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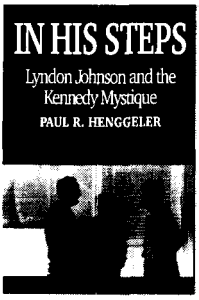

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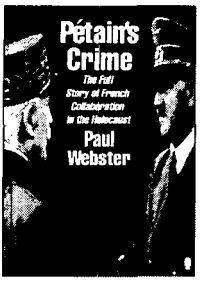

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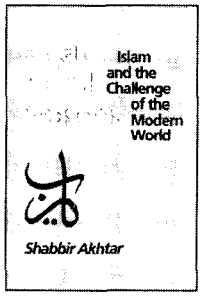

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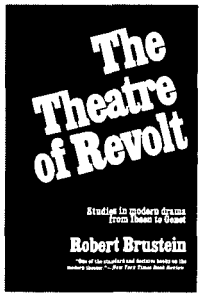

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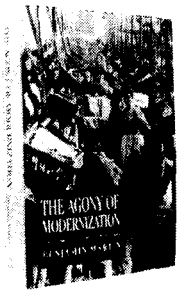
Our Thanks to Our Readers!

We are pleased to report that our biannual fund drive has reached the amount of $89,405 as of February 1. This is slightly more than we received two years ago; the number of contributors (which matters to us quite as much as the total amount) is significantly larger.

Given the approach of recession, and the political-intellectual confusions of the present moment, this successful outcome of our fund drive means that there is a group of people "out there," ranging from New York to the Pacific Coast, who feel a strong commitment to *Dissent* and who are prepared to demonstrate it in practical ways.

So, we want to say to you, our readers and friends, some of whom have contributed modest amounts and others quite substantial amounts—*we are encouraged and moved by your generosity.* It gives us the resources to continue in what we think is a valuable project, offering social criticisms and advancing the views and values of the democratic left.

Dissent lives—and we thank you, we thank you! THE EDITORS



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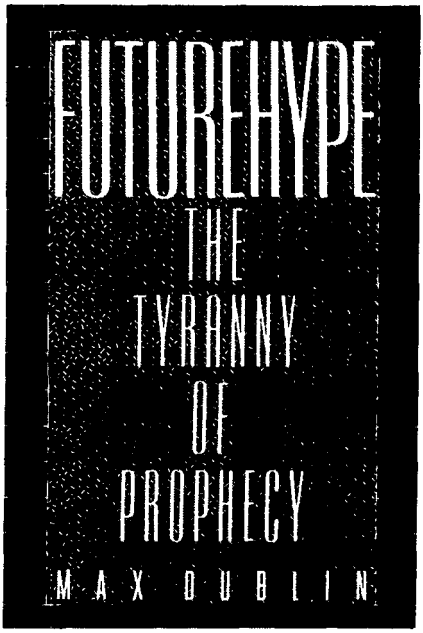

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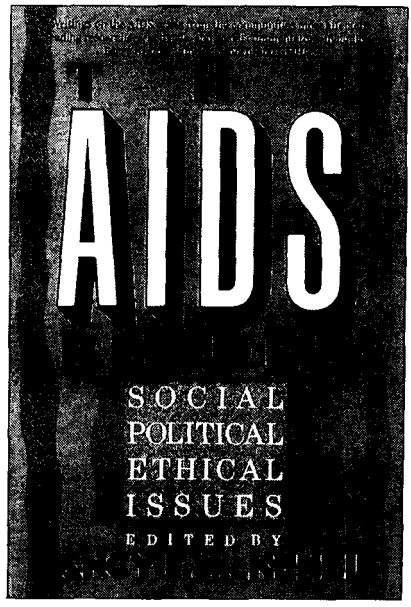

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Shlomo Avineri

BEYOND SADDAM: THE ARAB TRAUMA

In the Gulf War that Saddam Hussein forced on the whole world it was only natural that the Iraqi president should be portrayed as if he were the essential problem. If Iraq were routed, Saddam destroyed, and the Iraqi military machine demolished—according to conventional wisdom—a new world order could be created in the Middle East and stability restored to the region. But that is not the case.

Saddam Hussein is not the disease; he is only the symptom. With all his brutality, aggressiveness, and tyranny, he expresses a social phenomenon and a historical reality that are much more complex and threatening than the personality of this violent village thug who became a brutal ruler possessing weapons that endanger the region and the entire world. The problem is not Saddam. He is merely its most extreme and radical expression; hence, his personal disappearance—and it is hard to see how he will get out of this war alive—will not solve it. Although the solution of the problem itself is not at hand and is dependent on the outcome of the war, defining it and understanding it are possible and important even now. If we do not understand the problem, we shall end up being disappointed by the results of the war, even if it ends in a crushing victory over Saddam Hussein.

The problem is the social, economic, political, and ideological structure of the Arab world. For two hundred years, ever since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, this world has been coping with the West and its culture. The West conquered the Arab world and, in the process, became a symbol to be both imitated and hated. The West was both rejected by the Arab world and adopted by it. Even radical ideologies that intended to unite the Arab world against the West—secular nationalism à la Nasser, Arab socialism of one sort or another, or communism of the Soviet variety—all came from the West. Between this attraction toward the West and the repulsion from it, Arab society was pulverized and the Arab intelligentsia flung back and forth—an intelligentsia that sees Paris, London, New York, and Moscow as sources of inspiration and imitation but also of profound hatred. Thus, Saddam Hussein can carry on a war using purchased Western technology—and declare that the battle is between the Arabic-Islamic spirit and soulless Western technology. And thus, members of the Ba'ath party—secular Arab modernists—can turn into Islamic extremists. Islamic fundamentalism is now nourished by this love-hate relation. Israel forms its focus and symbolizes the Western ethos the Arab world both detests and wants to emulate, unsuccessfully and with intense yearning.

For the last hundred years, in the process of its failed modernization, Arab society has taken from the Western world all forms of government that it wanted to adopt. First, the Arab elites, educated in English and French schools, tried to adopt parliamentary-constitutional models, resulting in regimes like those of King Farouk in Egypt and Nuri Said in Iraq. Movements influenced by fascism and nazism emerged on the periphery of Arab society and produced such widely diverse phenomena as the Lebanese Phalangist movement and the Syrian and Iraqi branches of the Ba'ath party. Nasser's pan-Arab radicalism also wanted to take over secular nationalist ideas of the West and adapt them to the complex Arab reality. All these attempts failed; and the latest developments in Jordan and Algeria, responding to the demands of democracy, have also paradoxically promoted the forces of Islamic fundamentalism in both these divergent instances.

Only in this light is it possible to understand Islamic fundamentalism as a cry of protest for the despair of a hundred years of attempts to emulate the West and draw encouragement and inspiration from it. Except for Egypt, which, with a delicate and fragile balance,

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has managed to preserve a stable and valid form of government that is not overly oppressive, the political map of the Arab world knows only military-ideological dictatorships like Iraq's and Syria's on the one hand, and conservative monarchical regimes like Saudi Arabia's and Kuwait's on the other. Egypt's ability to preserve its internal balance while making peace with Israel—and there is a connection between the form of government in Egypt and its willingness to reconcile itself to the reality of Israel—is even more impressive in light of the ugly alternatives all around, including the Lebanese horror and the Libyan absurdity.

The failure of the Arab world is not unique and must be seen within the framework of the failures of modernization of the Third World in general. But the Arab failure is perhaps more profound and more searing because it occurs against a background of a rich Arabic-Islamic cultural legacy. On the one hand, this legacy is a cause of pride and high expectations; on the other hand, the legacy itself appears to constitute an obstacle to modernization. Moreover, this Arab failure is accompanied by an additional factor: the blessing—or curse—of oil.

In the last twenty years oil has brought an indescribable accumulation of wealth in those Arab countries where it exists in abundance. In Iraq, for example, it has helped the Ba'ath regime to advance impressively the standard of living of Iraqi society; but at the same time it has also enabled the construction of the Iraqi war machine and involvement in the war against Iran. Now Iraq and the entire area have been pushed into a major war.

But most of the countries where there is oil—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Gulf Emirates—are underpopulated and have leapt within less than a generation from the standard of life of Bedouin tribes into one of the most astounding accumulations of wealth in the world. Kuwait, which was merely a group of clans of marginal tribes up to the time of British control just before World War I, has become one of the richest countries in the world and a central investor in the money markets. Its financial position—above and beyond its oil wealth—influences the investment policies of the Western world more than any investment company or industrial giant.

However, as a consequence of the traditionalist, old-fashioned structure of these oil countries, they went through an accelerated process of economic modernization without any significant change in their political and social forms of government. Thus the Saud dynasty in Saudi Arabia and the al-Sabah family in Kuwait (and other families of sheikhs in the Gulf) were transformed from heads of tribes to heads of the richest countries in the world. Economic and political control remained in the hands of those same traditional strata (as their base was broadened and their life-styles were changed); and while some of those dynasties, as in Kuwait, managed to carry on a relatively enlightened policy of social investment, control and supervision of resources remained in the hands of the traditional rulers.

Two things characterized this accumulation of wealth in the hands of the traditional dynasties. First, as in another case of an amassing of wealth not originating in production (Spain and Portugal, which plundered their colonies in America over hundreds of years), this accumulation did not create a base for local industrial and economic development. It is the nature of wealth that does not originate in production to result only in consumption. Industrialization is created only by hard work, as in the West (and today in Japan, Korea, and other areas of the Far East). Second, the Arab masses in the Middle East do not share this wealth, which is concentrated mainly in the Arabian Peninsula. While the oil sheikhs enjoy unprecedented luxury and splendor, overpopulated Arab countries continue to wallow in poverty and the problems of the population explosion. Meanwhile, their rich relations throw them crumbs and leftovers from time to time, half as charity, half as bribery to keep them from upsetting the status quo that enables the rich to go on enjoying their riches.

This polarization in the Arab world occurred against a background of an Arab ideology which has claimed—since the rise of Arab nationalism at the beginning of the century—that the Arab world is one world, united in solidarity and lending institutional and political expression to this unity through the Arab League and the unified effort for the liberation of Palestine. Thus, on the one hand, the ideology, symbols, and language of solidarity emerged in the Arab world and, on the other hand, there is the reality of a growing social and economic gap between unimaginable wealth and unending poverty. The Palestinians and their singular problem also widened this gap between the ideal and the real; there is not a single Arab leader who has not raised the problem of Palestine to the top of his list of rhetorical concerns, but the practical willingness of Arab rulers for sacrifice—especially the conservative oil princes but also leaders like Assad and ultimately also Sadat and Mubarak—is limited and marginal. The leaders of Saudi Arabia did support the Palestinian Liberation Organization economically and politically, but, at the same time, they continued the good life, and are careful not to sacrifice the slightest iota of their wealth and position for their Palestinian brethren.

Never has there been a society like Arab society, so united by the ideal of unity and solidarity and so

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divided, fragmented, and polarized in reality. The Arab reality, as reflected in the consciousness of both the masses and the intellectuals, is the oil emirates squandering their wealth—the wealth of the Arab nation—in the casinos and brothels of the West, while opposite them are the millions suffering deprivation as well as the distress of the Palestinians, which is not even close to a solution—even after three years of the intifada, twenty-four years after the Six-Day War, and forty-three years after the founding of the State of Israel.

Into this vacuum between ideal and reality, between the vision of unity and sacrifice and the reality of lying and demoralization, came Saddam Hussein. By invading Kuwait he captured the imagination of the Arab masses in most Arab countries and the Palestinians as well. In this respect, there is a similarity between him and Hitler, not in the propagandistic sense used by many Western (and Israeli) observers, but rather as a factual assessment. Hitler achieved so much support among the German people during the thirties because, after World War I and the Versailles Treaty, Germany and the Germans had a great many just claims against the West, in economics, politics, and ideas. Hitler took these just claims and turned them into darts poisoned by the filth of his ideology, which saw Bolsheviks, capitalists, and Jews as responsible for all of Germany's woes.

In a similar way, Saddam plays on the just grievances and frustrations that fill the Arab world. Imagine an average Arab intellectual who wants to see the progress of the entire Arab nation in terms of political unity and economic development—a goal that, in itself, is certainly decent and hard to oppose. What does he find in reality? An Arab politics of deceit; kings and presidents, with none of whom he can identify; Arab wealth, which, if not squandered on conspicuous consumption in the West, is well invested in the stock markets of the West; princes and emirs who are strict about torturing all those who drink beer in their kingdom and who drink fine whiskey themselves in sexually mixed company in the West; and Palestinians who have become at best hewers of wood and drawers of water (albeit for fat salaries) in the courts of the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, while no one is willing to give up even a crumb of comfort to really help them either economically or politically.

Saddam Hussein burst into this arena, brutally ousted one of the richest and most despised rulers in the Arab world, stood up to the admired-and-hated West with a historic bravado, and promised the Arab world everything that Arab ideology had always promised: a pan-Arab solidarity that would bring about a just and equal division of the enormous wealth buried under the sands of the Arabian Desert, the destruction of the reactionary regimes and the artificial borders drawn (in fact) by Western imperialism and perpetuated by all Arab rulers without ideological distinction or social origin—by presidents as well as kings, emirs as well as military tyrants, and that he would also solve the Palestinian problem—as every Arab ruler (including the King of Saudi Arabia and the Emir of Kuwait) had always promised to solve it—through the destruction of Israel.

Not all of Hitler's followers were guttersnipes and sick Jew-haters. The elite of the German intelligentsia, a considerable part of its aristocrats, industrialists, and academics did indeed detest the miserable Austrian nonentity but nevertheless saw him as someone who would rescue Germany from her distress, which the frail Weimar democracy did not succeed in coping with. The parallel with Saddam Hussein is striking.

In this way, and only in this way, can we understand the enormous resonance Saddam Hussein has in the Arab world. Only the liquidation of these factors of frustration—and not just the end of Saddam—can create a more stable Middle East. The failure of modernization, the love-hate relationship with the West, the failure to deal with Israel, the despair with Western democracy and with communism, and the enmity toward the oil rulers—for every person who respects himself and his nation must feel degraded by their existence (especially if he relies on their charity, as do many Palestinians in Kuwait and the Gulf)—all these combine into the situation where a cruel despot finds himself becoming a symbol of the downtrodden and persecuted. Without the frustration and humiliation of the Germans, Hitler would not have risen to power; and without the genuine and profound frustrations of the Arab world, Saddam would not have risen either.

By challenging the whole world, Saddam guaranteed that his end would be, apparently, like Hitler's. Perhaps the Allies do not yet understand that, but the war against Saddam, if it succeeds, will have to be a total war. This is a harsh and terrifying vision, but it is hard to avoid it because the West was almost completely impervious to the real problems of the Arab world. In the last twenty years, the attention of Western policy has been devoted solely to two aspects of Middle Eastern reality: guaranteeing the flow of oil at reasonable prices for the Western economy and the investment of petro-dollars in the Western economy, for one, and the Palestinian problem, for another. These were the only problems that seemed important to the West; the crisis of the structure of Arab society was of absolutely no

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interest whatsoever. As a result, the West was not capable of understanding the Iraqi threat or its scope.

There were good reasons for the West to focus on those two points: the guarantee of oil at reasonable prices for the oil-dependent Western economy is a legitimate, vital, and justified interest. Those who sneer at a "war for oil" ignore the fact that without oil the culture and economy of the West cannot exist. For good or for bad, the culture of Western civilization as we know it relies on this oil, and a considerable part of it comes from the Middle East. The fear that the non-solution of the Palestinian problem is a factor in regional instability is also correct and justified.

But what did not interest Western society was who ruled the Arab world. As long as the oil flowed, the West was willing to get along with any Arab ruler, whether he was a feudal sheikh or a Ba'athist military tyrant, and to rake in as much wealth as possible from wheeling and dealing with him and his regime. Atomic reactors for Iraq—fine; AWACS planes for Saudi Arabia—why not? The possibility that the social imbalance would create a dangerous explosive did not interest anyone. In recent years, anyone who claimed that the Arab world was based on social injustice and terrifying inequality that could one day explode was considered by statesmen and sober scholars in the West as an ivory-tower intellectual, a bleeding heart, and perhaps (who knows?) even a communist, God forbid. And anyone who tried to argue that it was hard to guarantee stability in the region solely with the establishment of a Palestinian state, and that such a state could not contribute to regional stability if the region as a whole was based on a gap between emirs and tyrants, was considered an apologist for the status quo and perhaps a lobbyist for the Likud and an adherent of the Greater Israel Movement.

When the Gulf War ends in an Allied victory—and it will not end otherwise, even if the cost and suffering are harsh—the world will have to deal with the real and complicated problem: how to encourage the creation in the Arab world of a social, economic, and political order that will allow the Arabs, including the Palestinians, to express their uniqueness and their culture and that will guarantee oil at reasonable prices for the world economy—all that along with the creation of a more just and equitable Arab society, which will not be limited to the choice between sheikhs and corrupt rulers on the one hand and brutal dictators on the other. Such a regime cannot be imposed from outside, but it will by no means be achieved merely by a return to the status quo prior to August 2. It is also conceivable that a considerable part of that status quo will be eroded and destroyed in the war. Ultimately, it was this status quo that created the problem and promoted Saddam. Linear thinking, which sees the future as a direct continuation of what existed prior to the crisis, does not grasp how profound is the shakeup Saddam has given the Middle East and the entire world.

The best Arab and Western (and Soviet and Israeli) minds will have to deal with this problem, which will perhaps be similar to what happened in Europe (and Japan) after 1945. There is no magic solution to this problem, the path to it will be strewn with trial and error, with failures and conflicts, and no one today can envision the shape of the new Middle East, just as in 1939, no one could have imagined the shape of Europe after 1945.

It is important to remember that the problem is not only Saddam Hussein and his military might, just as the solution is not the restoration of the al-Sabah dynasty to its feudal estate or the safety of the royal Saudi government. The challenge after the war will be the creation of a more just and equal Arab society in the Middle East, a goal that Western imperviousness and greed, Soviet aggressive interests, and Arab social gaps and the frustrations that grew out of them have not yet been able to achieve.

Israel will also have to make her contribution to such a framework and, within it, will also have to find a solution to the Palestinian problem. But anyone who thinks of the postwar Middle East in prewar concepts is like those Bourbon princes who returned to Paris in 1815, clearly not having learned anything and not having forgotten anything. If Saddam is indeed only the symptom and not the disease, after the symptom disappears the disease must still be cured.

Translated from the Hebrew by BARBARA HARSHAV□

Oh, Oh!

Together with other American magazines, we are experiencing an increase in the cost of mailing *Dissent* via the Post Office that comes to more than 20 percent. We will try for a time to absorb the extra cost without raising the price of *Dissent,* but because we already run at a loss we can't say for how long. Well, we'll try.

—THE EDITORS

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The Gulf War—Taking Positions

All of these comments on the Gulf War were written in early February, almost two months before they will be seen by our readers, and weeks before the ceasefire was declared. Nonetheless, we think readers will be interested in knowing the opinions of our editors.

A variety of viewpoints appears below, roughly along the lines to be found within our editorial board. That there should be such differences neither surprises nor dismays us—a pluralism of opinion is part of our tradition. Dissent *does not take collective positions; each person below speaks for him- or herself.*—EDS.

Todd Gitlin

This war is a catastrophe, all the more so for being avoidable. There was—there remains—another way to stop Saddam Hussein: the combination of sanctions and genuinely multilateral enforcement. Now the unintended and half-intended consequences are spilling out like Kuwait's oil, with more horrors, no doubt, in store on every side.

Many brutalities, many brutalizations. This war is the terrible simplifier all around. On the prowar side one hears euphemisms for denying the terrible sufferings. The rationality of the think tank and the thrill of the video game generate fantasies of neat war and neater settlement. In some quarters, especially Israel, there is we-told-you-so pleasure that the just demands of Palestinians can once more be deferred. On the antiwar side one hears flaming anti-Semitism, harsh indifference to Israeli casualties and fright, refusal to recognize that something is at stake besides the lone superpower's desire to show off its smart bombs. The deep truth is that the United States has blundered into an Arab civil war between radical nationalism (latched to a fascist tyrant) and bloated emirates—a monstrous war likely now to go on, one way or another, for the rest of our lives, to the great economic and political and, I want to say, spiritual detriment of all.

This is scarcely good old World War II all over again. Damn the facile analogies, from El Alamein to Vietnam! The Middle East is tinder. The civilization that began there could end there. To oppose the war both tough- and tender-mindedly—not on the ground that the United States is the font of all evil, not because Israel explains Saddam Hussein, not because Saddam is the prince of noble anti-imperialism—to oppose the war in this difficult way is, on the other hand, to bear witness to another possibility: that somehow, against the odds, smart collective security and diplomacy can stop aggression with less carnage than smart bombs.

Michael Walzer

In 1935 Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, and the League of Nations immediately voted to impose sanctions against Italy. European leftists supported the sanctions but were unwilling to use force to implement them—unwilling to fight or even to threaten to fight for Haile Selassie's empire. The sanctions, unenforced, failed. Something has been learned since then: most people on the left today favored a militarily enforced embargo against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait, and many were prepared to threaten war—in defense, this time, of the al-Sabah family's feudal emirate. They understood that it is only the aggressor who chooses the victims of aggression; the victims don't have to be, and won't usually be, embodiments of sweetness and

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light. Nonetheless, aggression ought to be resisted. Regimes like Mussolini's and Saddam Hussein's, whenever they move beyond their borders, ought to be forcefully (not merely rhetorically) opposed.

But it is a hard question whether and when this opposition should reach to actual warfare. How much time must be spent seeking political solutions? How long should one threaten to attack without attacking? These questions would have been foreclosed had the Kuwaitis, against all the odds, held off the invading army for a few weeks and had we simply joined their resistance. The speed of the conquest meant that the questions had to be answered (and the war begun) in slow motion and in cold blood. Still, there was a lot of negotiating between August and January, and the strategy of forcing Saddam Hussein to withdraw with a threat and a deadline and a vague offer of peace and safety was not unreasonable: most observers, applying their own version of rational decision theory, thought that it would work. In the event, that strategy made the war certain. And once it was begun, I can't see that there was anything to hope for but the decisive defeat of the Iraqi forces.

This is a war to which American leftists should give critical support. Not unqualified support (which no war deserves), for we need to guard against any escalation in the aims of the war and in the means with which it is fought. The legitimate aim of the war is the end of the aggression and the containment of the aggressor. If the fighting should end while Iraq's army and its war-making power is still intact, then it will be necessary to renew the embargo, at least on military technology. We should in any case seek some sort of postwar arms control regime. But that is a political, not a military, goal—as are all the other nice things that one might wish for in the Middle East: democratization, redistribution of oil revenues, an overall peace settlement.

Given limited ends, the war should be fought with limited means, protecting civilian lives as far as possible and rejecting any policy that targets Iraq's nonmilitary industrial plant. The possibilities for escalation are numerous and vivid, and it is here that leftists should draw their own line. "Bring the troops home" is a bad slogan, for it suggests an outcome that will be called, and will be, a victory for Saddam Hussein. Better to argue about what the troops should do and shouldn't do, and then about what the United States and the United Nations should do once the troops are done.

Joanne Barkan

With George Bush ready to touch off a ground war in the Gulf, what could be more futile than "calling" for a substitute policy that has no chance of being adopted? But resignation—which means an end to public debate—disables democracy. So here are the slogans I'd write on my banner today: Stop the war. Stop Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Stop Saddam Hussein.

Is there a way to reconcile these demands? During a cease-fire, economic sanctions and a military blockade would continue to sap Hussein's strength. All the pre–January 16 arguments about the effectiveness of this strategy to force him out of Kuwait still hold. And, since mid-January, many of the resources sustaining his occupation have been blown to bits in the massive allied air campaign. Shouldn't making him leave Kuwait be easier now?

The air war has also refocused the problem of Hussein's capacity for chemical, biological, and nuclear warfare. One assumes either that tens of thousands of bombing sorties have destroyed many of his production facilities and stashes or that the materiel is so well protected as to be largely impervious to further raids. In the latter case, even the most devastating ground war in Kuwait would not eliminate the inventories stowed in Iraq. After the war, the allies would still have to work out a tough disarmament for Iraq—and eventually for the Middle East. A successful strategy of sanctions could (and must) include that same disarmament.

Before January 16 the existence of a credible alternative to war made the choice of war unjustified. The reality of war since January 16 has yet to alter that conclusion.

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Irving Howe

There is no ready-made socialist position on war. Those who think there is indicate that the pluralism of judgments that we favor in general may not have prevailed among ourselves. Pacifists and Leninists have prepared answers; we, for better or worse, do not. With strong predispositions against military actions, we nevertheless have to judge each situation as it comes along, relying on specific analyses and fallible intelligence.

Liberals and socialists have certain virtues. Liberals stress the need for rationality and conciliation; socialists provide theories about the deeper roots of conflict. But neither tradition is very strong at coping with a twentieth-century phenomenon: the ruthless, perhaps mad, dictator—on a large scale, a Hitler and, on a small scale, a Hussein—who establishes a totalitarian regime at home and attempts expansionist aggression abroad. Yes, it would be good if liberal reason could prevail; and yes, there is often a point to socialist indictments of imperial rivalry. But neither of these quite provides an immediate response to the tyrant's accumulating power and his imperial ventures. What shall be done about the frightening prospect that the thug who rules Iraq—he who has already used poison gas against the Kurds and sent missiles to kill civilians in Tel Aviv—might soon have nuclear weapons? To such questions neither we nor our friends in the antiwar movement provide sufficient answers.

Before the war began, my response was one of ambivalence (by no means, I'd say, the worst or least cogent response). True, Saddam Hussein was partly a creature of the Western powers and the Soviet Union, both of which contributed to his military prowess. True, Bush's talk about a "New World Order" is hard to take seriously. But to list all such criticisms of American policy, even to multiply them tenfold, is not yet to answer the immediate question: *What should be done with or about Saddam Hussein?*

I favored the embargo and wished it had been kept going, without military measures, for several months longer. Not because I was sure it would work, but because I hoped it might avoid the horrors of war. But now that the war is a reality, I want to see a defeat of Saddam Hussein sufficient to destroy his nuclear, biological, and chemical capacities. That this will not in itself solve all the problems in the Middle East—of course. (What can?) But unless we want to comfort ourselves with abstract "positions" of rectitude, I see no alternative. For someone on the left this is an uncomfortable stance, but there it is.

David Bromwich

We are good at ambivalence. But a few simple facts about the war must not be forgotten. It began in July 1990, when the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly, and Secretary of State James Baker, in the various settings of an interview with Saddam Hussein, a prepared statement before Congress, and an ad lib statement for the American press, all gave signals that could be plausibly read as saying to Iraq: *Do what you like with Kuwait.* Two apprentice diplomats and a master pollster with no international pretensions brought us to this catastrophe. In allowing them to do it, President Bush overrode the counsel of his Secretary of Defense and the Director of the CIA, both of whom warned that indifference to the threat of invasion would lead irreparably to war. This was a criminal blunder. It did not spring from mere neglect, however, but from a conscious political choice. The president's first thought was: a war is bad at election time (the election being 1990). His second thought came to be: a protracted standoff in foreign policy—as when sanctions have damaged but not defeated an enemy—is worse at election time than a finished war (the election being 1992). The size, the scope, the likely consequences of the war, and the fact that there is a war *now*, all follow from the rapidity of the shift in one man's mind from the first to the second of these thoughts.

A working political democracy does not work like this. But in the conduct of foreign policy, we have gone a long way now to a different system: a plebiscitary despotism, in which the executive is invested with extraordinary powers and contact with a docile public is mediated on television and in newspapers by reports of actions already taken. The single encouraging sign has been that the Congress and Senate did, at last, acknowledge their constitutional duty to participate in the national decision whether to go to war. They did it too late. But by responding at all, and hearing themselves say the things they said, they may

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have built up a useful memory against the rapid orchestration of future wars. At present, for those of us who believe that Saddam Hussein had to be stopped from invading Saudi Arabia; that he ought to have been driven from Kuwait by sanctions and international pressure; that, to gain any chance of success, those means required a longer trial than three months—for us, there is little to add to the warnings of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Daniel Moynihan, and so many others. The evil effects of this war are hard to predict and may be hard to shake off.

The same is true of all wars that are not wars for survival; it is why they leave a sick feeling from the start. Yet the president determined in November that the fighting should start early, with whatever loss to the spirit of internationalism. We spent forty-five years preparing for a moment in Soviet-American relations that may now be passing while we are occupied elsewhere. Possibly Gorbachev would not have moved on Lithuania and Latvia had our attention been engaged there. Certainly, the democratic movement in China will never thank us for the price we paid to get the Chinese communists to back the coalition. And the Iraqi refugee on the news the other night who said, "I hate Saddam Hussein, but I hate George Bush more"—what are we to make of him? There are thousands like him, and this war will create thousands more. As for the struggle for a decent society in America, it is a helpless euphemism to say that the conditions of the struggle will not be improved by anything about the war with Iraq. *Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return.* When we have the time to think, let us remember that evil is being done to us as well as them, and to some of us more than to others.

Dennis Wrong

The principle of collective security justifies the effort to repel by force Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Both the League of Nations and the United Nations were founded to resist armed aggression by creating, if necessary, military coalitions of concerned nations to deter or reverse it. Short of full-fledged world government, however, the principle cannot be applied with the consistency of domestic laws within the jurisdictions of established nation-states. The United Nations authorized the American-led military resistance to North Korea's invasion of South Korea in 1950. It condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, but, as with earlier Soviet aggressions, it did not support military action in circumstances that risked war between the superpowers. The United States has also been guilty of a few questionable military interventions, but none of them involved lengthy occupation of the country invaded, let alone its annexation. The end of the cold war now makes it possible to act on the principle of collective security without risking nuclear conflagration and with reference to an unambiguous case of one nation's engulfing another.

The claim that Kuwait is not a "real" country but a product of arbitrary mapmaking by imperial powers overlooks that this has been true of most territories subject to acts of aggression and therefore instances of *casus belli* in the present century. Consider the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Danzig in the 1930s and West Berlin, South Korea, and South Vietnam during the cold war. Saddam is clearly not a threat to world peace comparable to Hitler or Stalin, but his potential as a regional overlord is quite sufficient to justify action against him. That is what the United Nations and, for that matter, the armed forces of the United States are for. This is a legal and just war, whatever reasonable doubts there may be about its wisdom.

Brian Morton

Every war enriches the language. Saddam Hussein, safe in his führer-bunker, assures the people of his devastated country that "the mother of all battles" is proceeding gloriously. General Norman Schwarzkopf, asked about the civilians the United States has killed, replies that even surgical strikes involve some "collateral damage."

Of all the phrases that have come out of this conflict, the one that haunts me most was dreamed up by the Bush administration months before the fighting began. The possibility that Hussein might pull out of Kuwait, retaining only the islands of Bubiyan and Warba, and thereby undermining the rationale for a U.S. military invasion, was referred

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to by Bush and his people as the "nightmare scenario."

From the beginning, Bush made it clear that he would accept nothing short of Iraq's complete withdrawal from Kuwait. But he knew, as everyone knows, that if you leave your adversary no room for compromise, you leave him little choice but to fight. I can't claim to be sure that a combination of negotiations and economic pressure would have caused Hussein to give up his stranglehold on Kuwait, but I think it's shocking that Bush never tried to find out. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was inexcusable—but if Hussein had been allowed to keep those two islands, would that really have been such a terrible thing? Is war preferable somehow?

Some people called for military action against Iraq not so much because of Kuwait but because of Hussein himself. With his brutality, his massive arsenal, and his regional ambitions, Hussein has long been a frightening figure. And of course, for many of us, his threats against Israel were a special concern, a special fear. But again, was war the most intelligent response? A more sober response would have involved sanctions, multilateral military containment, an embargo on military technology, and diplomacy—serious diplomacy, to ease the regional tensions that enable demagogues like Saddam to thrive.

People who opposed the policy of sanctions tended to argue that if we didn't fight Iraq now, we'd have to fight a stronger Iraq later. But we should be skeptical of this kind of certainty about the future. When China developed nuclear weapons, some conservatives called for a preemptive strike on the same grounds: if we don't fight now, we'll have to fight later. So far, that has not proved necessary.

George Bush, who has had so much trouble explaining anything at all about this adventure, has never even tried to explain why we were so friendly with Saddam Hussein before he invaded Kuwait. Hussein is a mass murderer, a war criminal, a vicious anti-Semite. Until August 2, he was our ally. Despite Bush's claims about a "New World Order," this episode strikes me as drearily familiar. We'll support the crummiest tyrant, until his interests conflict with ours; then we'll drop him, or destroy him, and support someone else. Some other tyrant, usually. □

Murray Hausknecht

THE POLITICS OF AMBIVALENCE

Think of the statistician's bell curve and you have the shape of public opinion today. At one tail are antiwar partisans for whom the Gulf War is a continuation of Vietnam, while at the other tail is an equally automatic reaction of chauvinistic patriotism. The numbers at both extremes are small; the bulk of opinion is grouped around the mode of ambivalence.

The specter of Vietnam haunts the ambivalent. Among those on the left there is an increasing uncertainty about whether the analogy holds, and, consequently, ambivalence ranges from a growing willingness to consider the case for war to a reluctant assent that incorporates a strong hostility to the Bush administration. On the right, the belief in the Munich metaphor is shaken by memories of Vietnam that undercut initial certainties. In the country at large there is probably a skew toward greater support for the war, but this will probably shift if the war is prolonged. Americans, in short, support the war but not, perhaps, wholeheartedly.

Israel is a fissure that cuts across this somewhat oversimplified picture. It splits neoconservatives like Norman Podhoretz and A.M. Rosenthal from conservative troglodytes like Patrick Buchanan, while on the left it fractures the cohesion of those who are ideologically disposed to be more sympathetic to the claims of the Palestinians than to the Israelis' fears for their security. The problem of Israel reinforces the ambivalence that pervades almost the entire political spectrum.

I want to argue that ambivalence is politically appropriate and that, for the time being at least, we should not attempt to resolve it.

For those who support the war it is necessary to retain a deep distrust of the Bush administration for at least two reasons. First, there are questions of judgment and prudence. The invasion of Panama

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was obscene, and hindsight is not the only basis for condemning the administration's pro-Iraqi tilt in the Middle East right up to the invasion of Kuwait. The decision to increase the number of troops from the 250,000 ostensibly deployed for the protection of Saudi Arabia to 500,000 sharply limited future options, and it was made without congressional consultation. These actions reflect a lack of judgment and prudence.

Second, the Panama invasion and the reinforcement of the troops in Saudi Arabia are related to a moral flaw in George Bush's character apparent even before his election. When he used the Willie Horton television spot—an appeal to the electorate's racism for which he has never apologized—he demonstrated that he was not worthy of trust. In somewhat old-fashioned terms, George Bush is not an honorable man, someone upon whose probity you can rely. Honor is politically important in any representative democracy and particularly important in our system, where a president wields great power. When elected officials cannot be trusted, it is necessary to subject their actions to continual surveillance.

This is especially important when we ask what the Gulf War is supposed to accomplish. Success in war is never simply the surrender of one army to another; war is undertaken in the pursuit of long-range political goals. If the history of war in the twentieth century has taught us anything it is that in a democratic society those goals must be a matter of public discussion; no democracy can afford to leave such decisions wholly to the president and Congress. In the case of George Bush, who lacks judgment, prudence, and honor, this becomes an imperative of the first importance. Our ambivalence deprives him of unconditional support, helps maintain necessary vigilance over his actions, and so furthers the possibility that the death and destruction of war might serve some acceptable human ends.

Vietnam inevitably shadows the thoughts of all who cannot bring themselves to support this war, but their certainties are subverted by at least two major differences between the Gulf War and Vietnam. First, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a clear violation of a nation's sovereignty. There is a paradox that must be faced here. If one believes that Bush's invasion of Panama was inexcusable, then one must grant that his defense of Kuwait, if not his decision to go to war, is justifiable. That it is a nation with a repugnant social and political system is irrelevant; if there is ever to be a peaceful and stable international order, the territorial integrity of nation-states must be respected and defended.

Second, while the hyperbole of equating Saddam Hussein with Hitler should be avoided, the unprovoked missile attacks on Israel, the deliberate spilling of oil into the Gulf, and the previous genocidal attack on the Kurds should be sufficient grounds for ambivalence among those who do not support the war. That is to say, the war in the Persian Gulf can at this time be morally justified and deserving of support, even if the judgment, prudence, and trustworthiness of Bush and his administration are deeply suspect.

Ambivalence is a trying state of mind, whatever one's political sentiments. The uneasiness it creates is the price of political commitment in today's world. □

Mitchell Cohen

AFTER THE WAR . . .

After the smart bombs, America needs an intelligent agenda.

For over a decade, Americans have heard that "big" government ruins everything. The public weal—everything save flag waving and arresting flag burners—is best left to private enterprise.

Yet when the government decides, half a million Americans can be transported halfway around the globe, quite efficiently. Whether one favors the Gulf intervention or not, the question needs posing: if this country can summon energy, resources, and lives for war, why can it not mobilize against its own domestic rot?

Veterans of the Gulf War are likely to ask this question, particularly those—the poor and minorities—who enlisted in the military because it offered what the Reagan-Bush era has systematically denied them: life options. One can almost read their lips: If

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we fought for a "New World Order" and the "American Way of Life," just what is the American order to which we return? If we can make sacrifices abroad, why are sacrifices for the domestic good met with refrains of "No New Taxes," with regressive taxation masked as "reform," with "big" government kept off the backs of S&Ls and firms selling technology to Iraq? Why does this country need a cut in the capital gains tax but not a serious energy policy or national health insurance?

For eight years an actor-president molded America into a welfare state for the wealthy, manipulating media images to obscure socio-economic venalities. His successor is, to borrow a phrase, a tactician without a concept. Bush speaks of creating a new world order, but when the desert storm clears, what will be most visible is deep domestic malaise born of the Reagan order.

Sobriety should be the hallmark of the United States's Mideast agenda. When the war is over—I assume Iraq's defeat—America's massive military presence in the Gulf should end as quickly as possible. Desert Storm must not become Desert Fortress. A truly multinational United Nations force should take on peacekeeping responsibilities, securing the borders of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the integrity of Iraq, and the safety of the Kurds. The Security Council should be responsible for it, so that the prelude to the 1967 Mideast war cannot be repeated. (Nasser demanded the removal of the U.N. force separating Egypt and Israel, and U.N. Secretary General U Thant simply complied.)

Peacekeeping should be accompanied by rebuilding and redistribution. The Gulf's great oil wealth could fund a regional development program to relieve the brutal poverty consuming Egypt and other Mideast lands. But this should be an Arab affair, with America offering only technical assistance. Iraq—that is, a Saddam-less Iraq not squandering vast oil wealth on military machines—could play a major role.

Naive formulae about solving all of this volatile region's problems at a stroke must be resisted. Search the last two centuries of Mideast history for a decade of calm—you will not find it. America can contribute to conflict resolution, but giddy notions of "Pax Americana" are a lure into diplomatic quicksand. The Arab-Israeli struggle, the Kurdish question, Syria's occupation of Lebanon—all these need to be addressed, but only with studious recognition of their complexities.

Consider the Kurds, who compose the fourth largest ethnic group in the Mideast. They are mostly spread across four countries—all opposed to their self-determination. One is, of course, Iraq, where Kurds are about 20 percent of the population and have been particularly victimized by Saddam's regime. Two others are American allies in the Gulf conflict (Turkey and Syria), and another is neutral (Iran). Bush could not afford to offend them; thus the plight of Iraqi Kurds was not "linked" to the Palestinians, when Saddam "linked" the latter to Kuwait.

The Kurds are as wary of the West as of their neighbors. After World War I, the Treaty of Sèvres promised them independence. But when events made this inconvenient to bigger powers, Kurdistan was expendable. In 1974–75 the Shah of Iran, with American collaboration, backed Kurdish guerrillas against Iraq. Then, when the Iranian monarch reached an accord with Baghdad, they were sacrificed, with American connivance. When Saddam gassed 5,000 Kurds in Halabja in 1988, the White House averted its eyes. The United States can begin to make amends by insisting on a fair deal for the Kurds when Desert Storm winds down.

The Kurdish leadership—united in 1987 as the Kurdistan Democratic Front—has demonstrated remarkable savvy in formulating demands and subordinating bitterness at past betrayals to political exigency. Cognizant of their nervous neighbors and appreciative of their own limitations and need for allies, they are pressing not for a maximalist program—independence—but for Kurdish autonomy in a democratic Iraq. As a result, they have gained support from a diverse array of Iraqi oppositionists.

Clearly, the Kurds did not learn politics from the Palestinians. It is not just that Arafat embraced Saddam or that the "moderate" West Bank editor Hanna Siniora describes Iraq's chief as an "Arab Garibaldi." If Palestinians want Israeli flexibility, they must convince Israelis that it is in their interests. Instead, Palestinians have taken the opposite tack, apparently believing that nothing they do will carry a political cost. They are tragically wrong. If a peace process commences, what will reverberate in Israeli ears is not just the sound of exploding SCUDs but also of Palestinian applause for them—and for Saddam Hussein proclaiming that Tel Aviv would become "a crematorium."

The Israeli right wing has long confused its integral nationalism with Israeli security needs, thereby precluding territorial concessions. The Palestinians have enlisted in their cause: each Palestinian cheer for a SCUD meant a vote for the Likud and a blow to the only real friends the Palestinians have—the Israeli peace movement, now struggling against the most extreme right-wing government in Israeli history. The recent inclusion of "Gandhi"—the Orwellian nickname of Rehavam

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Zeevi, a moral primitive who advocates expulsion of the Palestinians—in Shamir's cabinet engendered dismay among Israel's friends. It is perhaps misplaced: he is only the unrepressed id of much of the Likud.

When Desert Storm ends, the United States should promote a Palestinian-Israeli peace process—but with open eyes. All good people know how to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: mutual recognition. All sober people know how tortuous the situation is. □

James B. Rule

THERMIDOR IN THE USSR?

The news from the USSR is ominous. The Soviet Interior ministry has attacked institutions of representative government in Lithuania and Latvia; Estonia waits nervously. Unarmed supporters of the elected governments of these republics have been shot or crushed under tanks. For the moment, Moscow has turned down some of the pressure—no one knows for how long. Meanwhile, Gorbachev has driven the reformers and liberals from his government, beefed up the military and the KGB, and sought to reimpose censorship. He continues to assert, less and less convincingly, that his goals remain unchanged.

For the last five years we have watched Gorbachev balance forces of democratization, marketization, and openness against the centralist old guard. He has always sought the middle ground, casting himself as the voice of reason and moderation between dangerous extremes. Now, it appears, the middle has finally collapsed beneath him. Perhaps no more splittable differences remain. We fear that the revolution has been checked, and Thermidor is setting in.

What is the best hope of the democratic left in this dangerous moment? The answer is not as easy as it may at first seem. Of course, we support, as always, reform and democratization in the USSR. The undoing of Stalinism in all its forms is the highest priority; we want to see all those forces not just dead but buried. We deplore the repression of the Baltic republics—not only because of their unique history but because repression of peaceful and democratic political aspirations is always wrong. Both these nations and other elements of the Soviet Empire must be permitted to evolve their own relations with their neighbors.

But not even a miraculous reversal of the ominous recent trends would ipso facto assure triumph for democratic and egalitarian politics. Large-scale, centralized repression can all too easily give way to small-scale intolerance that is no more agreeable. The nationalism that has, among many other sentiments, helped fuel the revolt against Stalin's legacy can give rise to utterly illiberal treatment of minority views and minority nationalities. The dangers of such intolerance manifested themselves, and continue to do so, in Armenia and Azerbaijan. They are equally, if latently, present in other Soviet republics, including the Baltics themselves.

For authentic democrats, even a clear victory over resurgent authoritarian centralism does not suffice; we also hope for regional *modi vivendi* that make room for a full range of social and political diversity. By this I mean diversity of political conviction and social values, as well as diversity of language, culture, and way of life. In a country composed of such various elements as the USSR, any alternative to such tolerant civil arrangements represents both moral and political disaster—as every group and region seeks both to separate itself from larger units and to resist splits from disaffected groupings within itself.

Perhaps the best hope is that the pushing and shoving of regional opposition to central rule in the USSR will give rise to some sentiment for federalism across regions. In this way, perhaps, devolution of central power can be tempered by cognizance of complementary economic and administrative needs. Here, too, all sorts of nettlesome problems present themselves: How are the interests of poorer republics and regions, often pushed into subservient economic roles by generations of central planners, to be protected? How can exploitation of the resource-poor by the resource-rich be avoided?

The trouble is, the luxury of worrying about these issues may not be granted in the immediate future. For now, we recoil at the attempts of Stalin's

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would-be heirs to reimpose themselves. We appeal to the Western democracies to give no comfort to reaction, and we seek ways to aid supporters of democracy and civil liberty within the USSR. We hope that support for these values has grown too strong to be crushed and that the old coalition of what Michael Walzer has called "failed totalitarianism" cannot be reassembled. But we cannot afford to count on these things; the Soviet Union is shuddering on the brink of reaction. □

Bogdan Denitch

A BAD TURN IN THE SOVIET UNION

It was always unlikely that the democratization of public life in the Soviet Union would continue if combined with a collapsing economy, a disintegrating political system, and internal separatism. Something had to give, and the most likely victim was democratization. Democratization was in peril as long as economic and political reform did not bring improvements in personal life. Instead, Soviet citizens were assured by foreign and domestic experts that the only possible economic road was a "free market" combined with private ownership and greater inequality. The path would be painful, would bring high unemployment, and, if that were not enough, an even lower standard of living.

To these disasters were added the disintegration of public security, increased crime, and a widespread loss of belief in the future of whatever might be left of the Soviet Union. To be sure, crime, corruption, miserable conditions, hooliganism, and national intolerance did not spring up full grown with *glasnost* and *perestroika*—censorship had kept them invisible. Many Soviet citizens thus now believe that the reforms hailed by Western democrats have made things worse.

So far, the reforms have made life worse for *most* Soviet citizens. The beneficiaries of the reforms are three groups, none of which is popular. The first beneficiaries are the artful dodgers, the spivs and gray-market traders who have profited from the disintegration of the old system and its controls. The second group to benefit are those Jews who wish to emigrate, in order to get away from the dismal Soviet scene and out of the reasonable fear that growing misery will lead to increased anti-Semitism. The third group to benefit from Gorbachev's reforms is the intelligentsia, which has gained a degree of intellectual and artistic freedom and an ever more open press and media—at least until the crackdown of January 1991. How far back the pendulum of freedom will swing will depend on resistance encountered, at home and abroad.

Although extremist nationalists and populists have also benefited from increased freedom of expression, the intellectuals were the major beneficiaries. That is why foreign observers, journalists, and Soviet experts were generally so "high" on Gorbachev. They talk mostly to intellectuals, for whom *glasnost* was a very real gain. It was less so for the bulk of the population, which expected greater freedom to lead to economic improvements.

Journalists report considerable vocal support "in the street" for the crackdown against those who are taken to be responsible for the intolerably long lines, the scarcity of almost everything, the growing insecurity of the wage earners and pensioners, and the increasing economic differences. The love of some Soviet intellectuals for a fantasy version of a pure "Thatcherite market" has helped increase class resentments among those in the populace who fear they would be the first to suffer from its introduction—a fear that the recent experiences in Eastern Europe help reinforce.

The Western insistence on untried economic reforms as a precondition for any real aid has also jeopardized democratization in the Soviet Union. It should have been clear from the beginning that, in communist-ruled politocracies, political reforms must precede economic reforms. Otherwise, economic reforms will remain at the mercy of the political bureaucracy. Massive economic aid is the

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other minimal condition that any democratic Soviet government would need to begin constructing a new type of mixed economy. Instead, the West has provided economic and financial experts who knew next to nothing about the history of the area or about the politocratic systems for which they proposed to write definitive economic programs.

The same innocence and ignorance extend to Western prescriptions about nationalism and separatism. What is proposed is something no Western democratic state would dream of practicing. Just as "pure" market economies are not practiced in the managed capitalism of Western welfare states, no Western state accepts that it is an automatic right of provinces, even though they may have had a distinct history and ethnic make up, to separate unilaterally. That idea is reserved for the Soviets and East Europeans. This was not insisted on even in the cases of Third World countries, as the cases of Biafra, Kashmir, Katanga, Eritrea, Timor, and Kurdistan illustrate. In none of these instances was it proposed to stop aid or mobilize world public opinion against the dominant country unless it immediately accepted the independence of a suppressed and incorporated nation. No sanctions were proposed against France for its stand on Corsican, Breton, and New Caledonian separatists, or against Spain for its resistance to a separation of Catalonia or the Basque region, or against Great Britain for its denial of Scottish or Irish rights to vote on immediate separation. These claims to national independence or autonomy were seen as propositions, to be, at best, negotiated.

It is true that the Baltic countries are different. Most countries have never accepted the Baltic states's forced incorporation into the Soviet Union through the Hitler-Stalin pact. That view is also shared by the Soviet democratic opposition. The Baltic countries and Moldavia, therefore, are in a different situation from the other Soviet republics, at least from the point of view of international law. But even in these cases, independence is still something to be negotiated.

Not the least item to negotiate are guarantees of rights for minorities in the proposed newly independent Baltic states. Unfortunately, both historical experience and the declarations of many nationalists are not reassuring. Some nationalists in Latvia and Estonia would strip the close to 40 percent "minority" population, including those born there, of voting and civic rights. Nor does it help matters when nationalists insist that there is nothing whatever to negotiate, that all they have to do is unilaterally to vote their independence. What are the grounds for assuming that most nationalists and separatists in the Soviet Union want democracy?

Nevertheless, the Soviet army's crackdown in Lithuania is both morally repugnant and politically stupid. It must be universally condemned. It will make both negotiations and the future of the non-Lithuanians in Lithuania immensely more difficult. Soviet democrats, particularly in the Russian Republic, were right to organize mass protests. They were aware that this crackdown signals a massive entry of the military onto the Soviet political scene, in alliance with the conservatives who want to maintain the party's dominance.

Gorbachev was always a top-down liberalizer, who wanted to create a more modern, efficient, and powerful Soviet Union. He was never a principled democrat, but he understood that modernizing the Soviet society required opening up a degree of democratization. In this, and in helping to wind down the cold war, he has played a historical role of great importance. However, many in the West forgot that he does have iron teeth. It is good to be reminded that the struggle for democracy cannot depend on modernizing reformers alone. It requires mass democratic organizations, trade unions, and the development of a civil society. Many of the reforms and changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe now seem irreversible. Democratic change therefore still remains possible—not easy, not inevitable, but at least possible. □

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SOCIAL BREAKDOWN

Edited by Fred Siegel

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Approaches and Speculations

Irving Howe

BY WAY OF A BEGINNING

What We Mean by Social Breakdown

Social decline? Social decay? Social breakdown? We wondered which of these phrases, none of them "scientific" in nature, would best apply to the current situation in the United States. Social decline—too mild. Social decay—that suggests a process too slow. Social breakdown—perhaps that's too strong, though each passing day makes it seem an appropriate term. Or, let's say, a handy approximation. In the pages that follow there is a sufficient accumulation of evidence that, even as American power in the world may be increasing, something like domestic social breakdown is becoming a reality. Not the total reality, but a significant part, and of course it hasn't gone nearly so far as in the Soviet Union. Nor do we pretend to be advancing a comprehensive theory of social breakdown. Let's just go step by step.

What, to start with, is the difference between social breakdown and cyclical economic crisis? A cyclical crisis, at least according to some economic theories, can be expected to right itself in time; at whatever cost to its victims, the economy finds paths to self-correction. When we speak, however, of a social breakdown, we have in mind a serious crack-up or dissolution of those social bonds and norms, those social habits and practices, that are not likely soon to be corrected through the "normal" inner developments of the economy. For example, there is no reason to suppose that the problem of the "underclass," especially the portion of it in the black community, will be solved if left to the mercies of the usual cyclical turns in the economy. Given an interval of relative affluence, that problem may be alleviated, but it will remain. Given an interval of bad times, that problem will remain in aggravated form. It is a problem for which a solution can be approached only through a linkage of major social programs, systematically introduced and sustained over a long period of time. And, even then, we cannot be certain.

The years of the Great Depression were marked by a cyclical economic downturn so severe it soon took on the characteristics of a social breakdown as well. The economy collapsed, the social consequences were devastating. Serious people, not only of the left, wondered whether the capitalist system could survive. It required two radical courses to bring the depression to an end: first, the introduction of welfare-state reforms and Keynesian economic policies (which in fact were not enough to do the job) and then a wartime version of a command economy.

At the present moment there isn't the faintest sign any such (or equivalent) measures are being considered either by the Bush administration or what passes for the Democratic opposition (which has lost the ability to distinguish between pragmatism and pusillanimity). In fact, one important difference between the domestic situation in the Soviet Union, where things are of course much worse, and in the United States is that Gorbachev has at least publicly acknowledged the desperate straits in which his country finds itself while our president, the famous "ass-kicker," maintains an austere muteness regarding domestic problems.

You don't have to be a genius to know

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there's something seriously wrong. You have only to take a walk.

Social breakdown is an imprecise term, but still a useful one. We use it to indicate observations and foreboding: things are coming apart, values are losing their grip, some problems seem to be intractable. If you need more objective signs, you'll find an anthology of them in this issue of *Dissent*. Let me just cite two or three:

- Life expectancy for young black males in our cities is lower than that for males of equivalent age in Bangladesh.
- The rates for homicide and violent crime are four to ten times higher in the United States than in Western European countries and three times higher than in Canada.
- The rate of incarceration (in plain English, prison) in the United States has doubled during the 1980s and is expected to double again by the end of the century.

It is the massing of such facts that occasions the forebodings and observations that lead us to speak of social breakdown. There's a sense of malaise, an atmosphere of alarm and anxiety. If the social sciences are not especially good at quantifying such things, you can probably find a keener realization in literature. In the writings of Tom Wolfe, a writer I don't admire, there are not only some keen observations pointing to the malaise but also coarse symptoms of the malaise itself. But just because these observations and forebodings have not yet been quantified or put into theoretical form is no reason to dismiss them. On the contrary, this is a moment in which to be especially alert, to watch and look and try to think.

I find it interesting that many of the contributors to this issue of *Dissent* conclude by remarking that "the market" (which has displaced the Almighty as our reigning deity) is incapable of dealing with the deep-seated social problems they describe. Nor is this due, for most of our contributors, to ideological preconceptions: some of them, I'd guess, are not socialists but serious experts in specific fields. They don't stop to say—it seems obvious—that, whatever the efficiencies attributed to the market, it also constitutes a somewhat fictitious entity whenever the word "free" is put before it, a figment, that is, of ideology. In the United States, as in all advanced economies, the market is intertwined with governmental agencies and constrained by regulations. But let that pass for the moment, and let us talk about the market as if it were something like the autonomous economic process that its celebrants claim.

No matter what the subject—crime, drugs, the savings and loans crisis—serious students of social problems all realize that the market, in its impersonality of function and its indifference to values and consequences, cannot cope with the afflictions that beset our society. Indeed, many of the signs of social breakdown are to be noticed in pockets and segments of the society barely touched by the market. The S&L scam, the carryings on of robber barons like the Boeskys and Milkens—these do occur, very much, within the market, exploited or rigged in behalf of enormous thievery, and, indeed, enabled by the values of *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware). The market neither interferes with nor protects anyone against such *goniffs*. The market obeys whatever force is in command; *the market has no speech*. And if we're even to begin coping with the breakdown of services in the cities, with crime and drugs and homelessness and high-level thievery, it will only be by controlling the market and deflating its ideology. We will have to recognize that whatever its uses in the production of goods and the setting of prices, it has little to say about the moral and social lives of men and women.

Let me cite a few relatively moderate opinions. Here is the Mexican writer Octavio Paz in his Nobel Prize speech:

> [T]he triumph of the market economy (a triumph that is owed to its adversary's default) cannot be only a cause for joy. As a mechanism the market is efficient, but like all mechanisms it lacks conscience and compassion. We must find a way of integrating it into society so that it expresses the social contract and becomes an instrument of justice and fairness. The advanced democratic societies have reached an enviable level of prosperity but at the same time they are islands of abundance in the oceans of universal misery.

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Paz might have added that within those "islands of abundance" located in "the ocean of universal misery" there are also overflowing lakes of "particular misery."

And here are a few sentences from James Tobin, the Nobel Prize economist and a good traditional liberal, writing in the Spring 1990 *Dissent*:

> Economic theory has always recognized externalities as exceptions to Invisible Hand propositions [that is, the workings of the market]. Externalities are nonmarket effects of economic activities on other economic activities. When agents receive no price signals to deter them from activities damaging to other agents . . . the market by itself fails to allocate resources optimally among activities.

What James Tobin says here about the effects on "other economic activities" holds still more for the noneconomic spheres of life—health, environment, education, and so on. In brief, for a large part of what we call civilization. And as long as we have administrations in Washington that because of either ideological fanaticism (Reagan) or mindlessness (Bush) or both (add a touch of stupidity too), refuse to recognize the necessity of social policy in a modern society, it seems likely that the process of breakdown—or, if you prefer, decline—will continue.

One sign of this breakdown is that we seem to have lost any clear consensus as to what constitutes a social problem. Such problems accumulate so copiously and are allowed to fester for such lengths of time that both definition and possible solution fade from public consciousness. The prevalent "solutions" for nationwide problems are, first, that the market be allowed to proceed in its majestic mystery; second, that there be improvements in "character," especially the character of the poor and oppressed; and third, that we acquiesce in the sophisticated resignation called "the limits of social policy." When government does intervene, as with the drug problem, it is increasingly in search of a quick fix, a dramatic gesture that will reach television—"the war" against crime, "the war" against drugs, "the war" against AIDS. How many such "wars" do we have going (in addition to the real one)? The very language should tip us off that nothing is being thought through in any serious way.

The Bush administration is allergic to thought, sometimes to speech as well; it behaves as if neglect will pull it through; it doesn't even pretend to have a domestic social policy. Indeed, the Bush gang makes the Reaganites look like deep thinkers, because the latter did have *some* ideas. So that when the Bush administration does approach a major social problem like drugs, it does so without any serious examination of a very complex matter (by contrast, there was the Kerner commission on crime, see Elliot Currie's article p. 254).

What the Bush administration could do was to declare a "war" ("kick ass"?). It appointed as the generalissimo of this "war" the right-wing windbag William Bennett. Much of the money allocated for this "war" went into Rambo-style efforts to prevent drugs from crossing our borders—a doomed effort from the start—rather than to education and therapy, which might bring some results. Predictably, "interdiction" didn't get very far, and the bored or frustrated generalissimo resigned from the "war" (quite as if he were a northern general at the start of the American Civil War). Bennett is an example of the new code of American capitalism: nothing succeeds like failure—tough talk followed by personal gain. But lest you start worrying about his future, there is no need: places are waiting for him on corporate boards and right-wing think tanks, and in a pinch the *New Criterion* might add him to its board.

In its approach to the drug "war," the Bush administration mimicked the style and substance of a television "special," with its quick once-over and dramatic sound effects. For it's not only that television copies the worst of our society, the worst of our society copies television. And, meanwhile, the very possibility of serious thinking about social problems, to say nothing of concerted actions, grows dimmer.

It is a commonplace that the rapidity of change in modern society, occurring as an interaction of technological and social factors,

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leaves many people stranded, feeling disoriented—psychologically and now, increasingly often, literally homeless. Such changes, to cite only a few, may include the large migration of blacks from the rural South to northern industrial cities, the collapse of some of those cities as a result of the transition from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, the decreasing availability of jobs for unskilled labor.

(An important point: some of these changes may be all but inevitable—for instance, the recent decline of mass-production industries and the growth of new modes of production and the service sector. But it is not at all inevitable that little or nothing be done—as is the case in the United States—to ease the lot of workers and other people who suffer the consequences of these changes. In West European welfare states, policies have been introduced toward this end.)

About the social-psychological consequences of the changes in modern society, useful concepts can still be found in the work of the great French sociologist Emile Durkheim. He locates in all societies a *conscience collective*, an ensemble of "beliefs and sentiments" shared by most of its members, even by those who declare themselves to be its opponents. The American dream of success or the ethic of possessive individualism might be examples. Now, when this *conscience collective* starts to break down under the pressures of internal discord or external threat or both, there follows a condition of anomie, defined as a feeling among groups or individuals that the effort to achieve what the society calls success has become meaningless. Such groups or individuals drop out of the more-or-less shared system of values. But they do not necessarily find a coherent substitute; they may drift along in a state of confusion or cynicism, or they may twist the dominant value system into their own improvisation, copying some of its elements while also being strongly opposed to it. Anomie is not a single condition, it can take a multitude of forms.

Let me cite a familiar example. One source of "antisocial" behavior among some young black males is their steady exposure, via the media, to the acclaimed riches and pleasures of American society—an exposure that may induce feelings of anger and bitterness insofar as they recognize that they are mostly barred from such riches and pleasures. In earlier centuries a peasant might not even have known about the luxuries enjoyed by the king's court or might have regarded this as the "natural" order of things. But today a resident of the urban ghetto knows perfectly well what luxuries are enjoyed by Donald Trump and Ivan Boesky (even in bankruptcy and jail). Some young blacks are then tempted to join drug gangs in order thereby both to emulate and challenge the dominant value system that discriminates against them.

Is it not clear that the number of people in the United States who during the last several years could be described, more or less, in Durkheim's categories, has increased significantly? Nor are they confined to the ghetto or the underclass. Various forms of anomie can also be encountered in the white middle class, among students and even in the business world. Dropping or falling out takes many forms.

Now, this social phenomenon is not new (nor is my description of it). No doubt it has been present in all societies, but there seems reason to believe that it is especially notable in modern industrial societies. It would therefore be foolish to suppose that the process of anomie or other modes of social breakdown began simply with the Reagan years—of course not. But I think it can be argued plausibly that the Reaganite view of society has been a strong catalyst in behalf of this process.

There is a paradox here. Reaganism, on one level, surely helped to reinvigorate among many Americans their faith in "the system," which had suffered pretty severe bruises during the previous few decades. So it is fair to say that Reaganism brought about a measure of social reintegration. But at the same time Reaganism advanced a set of values—extreme possessive individualism, open sanction for acquisitiveness and greed, sustained contempt for the welfare state, blunt hostility to trade unions—that are not workable for any length of time in a modern industrial society. The result has been a sharp increase in social disorder and

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malaise—with some of its symptoms named Michael Milken, Al Sharpton, Michael Deaver, the Keating Five (feel free to add to the list).

Reaganism, as Nicolaus Mills writes (see p. 154) was

> about changing the social contract between citizens and their government. . . . Fifty years ago, through a series of measures ranging from Social Security to Federal Deposit Insurance, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal established a modern social contract for America. That social contract said that the federal government had a responsibility to guarantee the accountability of the institutions on which the country depended.

We call this, in our shorthand, the welfare state, a modification of capitalism in behalf of both its survival and a measure of humaneness in its treatment of the deprived and oppressed. "Getting the government off our backs" became Reaganite code words for a new social arrangement in which the business ethic of *caveat emptor* was transformed into the political ethic of *caveat civis*, let the citizen beware.

The probable contest in the United States for the immediate future will be between two versions of capitalism: an ideologically rigid adherence to a minimally regulated "free market," or Reaganism without Reagan, and a modernized capitalism more or less committed to a social compact and recognizing that a central issue is who regulates the market and for what ends. That is very simply put, but for the moment it will do—others will render it more subtle in future issues.

Let me quote a few sentences from an as-yet-unpublished book by our colleague Bogdan Denitch:

> Capitalism needs to be regulated to save it from its own built-in mistakes [and excesses]. The individual pursuit of selfish goals may produce public good in abstract capitalist theory. However, in practice the narrow interests of sectors of the economy have to be regulated and restrained in the interest of the system as a whole. That is presumably the role of the state. . . . This means regulating the banks, keeping up the infrastructure and pushing technological innovation. All three of these will reduce profits of some players at a given time, all three require an interventionist government. This is the clear lesson . . . from Europe.
>
> The trouble is that the official ideology of American capitalism, its master myth, is anti-state. This, despite the fact that American business has repeatedly used the state to maximize profits. . . . Roosevelt's New Deal saved American capitalism by bringing in bank regulations, Keynesian pump priming, huge public projects . . . against the almost unanimous opinion of the capitalist class.

How does all this relate to our topic of social breakdown? Simply this: insofar as the country continues to ignore the need for social programs, insofar as it allows cities to fester, industries to collapse, growing segments of the population to fall into destitution, and insofar as it continues to advance an ethic that leads to a decline of community and solidarity, the process of social breakdown, limned in the following pages, will mount in intensity. The prescription for "capitalism with a (somewhat) human face" is by no means enough; it by no means removes the need for a larger socialist perspective. But for the immediate moment, it is what is urgently needed.

A last word: There are people of good intentions who may read this issue of *Dissent* and say, "Yes, what you're describing is true and important. But aren't you advancing as solutions the same old liberal proposals?" And I would answer unhesitatingly, "Yes, we certainly are, not because we think they are cure-alls but because we think they are important beginnings." If sometimes in these pages we theorize and speculate about long-range social change, it will be enough this time to speak about immediate needs. □

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Nicolaus Mills

CAVEAT CIVIS AND THE REAGAN LEGACY

"It was like anesthesia . . ."

"The guy had a magic touch. He was a dream man. Under Reagan, you know, it was like anesthesia," Harry Angstrom, the aging hero of John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* observes. Rabbit's observation is shrewd, but as the 1990s—with an oil crisis, a budget crisis, and stagflation—begin to look like a rerun of the early 1980s, the anesthesia has started wearing off. We know there is a link between our present troubles and the dreams we were encouraged to dream during the Reagan presidency.

The problem is that we still haven't put our finger on the real Reagan legacy. We know that he fostered a culture that turned the 1980s into a Second Gilded Age, and we know that he was wrong on specifics: on tax cuts that helped produce a $2 trillion debt, on deregulation that led to a $500 billion savings and loan scandal, on an energy policy that has made us depend on foreign imports for 50 percent of our oil. But what we have not grasped with the seriousness they deserve are the ideas behind Reagan policy—the true Reagan legacy.

Reaganism wasn't finally about specifics. It was about changing the social contract between citizens and their government, and it is this new realignment that we must understand if we are to come to terms with the Reagan revolution.

Fifty years ago, through a series of measures ranging from Social Security to Federal Deposit Insurance, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal established a modern social contract for America. That social contract said that the federal government had a responsibility to guarantee the accountability of the institutions on which the country depended but which no citizen could personally control. In succeeding years some presidents improved on the mechanisms of the New Deal social contract. Others chipped away at its egalitarian qualities. But no president—until Ronald Reagan—challenged the contract itself.

With Reagan, however, a new era began, as different from the preceding three decades as the New Deal was from the world of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. In the Reagan years the federal government no longer saw its primary task as one of protecting the average citizen from forces beyond his or her control. As the president observed in his first inaugural address, "In the present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Getting the government off our backs became Reagan-era code words for a new social arrangement in which the business ethic of *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware—was transformed into a modern political ethic, *caveat civis*—let the citizen beware.

Caveat civis did not mean that over the course of the 1980s the average American was systematically stripped of the social benefits acquired during the previous half century. When in 1981 the Reagan administration attempted to cut Social Security, it met with immediate resistance from Congress, and the president quickly backed away from his own proposals. The essence of *caveat civis* was that

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the government no longer had to defend itself for failing to defend those most in need. It was free to make its overriding goal the entrepreneurial one of promoting the interests of those most capable of creating wealth. As the president put it, "What I want to see above all is that this remains a country where someone can always get rich."

This changed view of government came from two different sources. The first was supply-side economic theory, based on the notion of the Laffer curve, which held that if taxes came down the wealthy would work harder and create an economy that produced higher revenues. The second source was the welfare theory, advanced by conservative social scientist Charles Murray, which argued that liberal poverty programs of the 1960s had not helped the poor get on their feet but created a cycle of welfare dependency. Ronald Reagan quickly made both views his own. Tax reductions became the economic heart of the Reagan revolution, and by his second term in office, he was saying of welfare, "With the best of intentions, government has created a poverty trap that wreaks havoc on the very support system the poor need most to lift themselves out of poverty—the family."

What followed was a political ethic that held that the federal government should begin to cut benefits going to the poor while making life easier for the wealthy. The Reagan tax cuts of 1981 and 1986 epitomized this process. They reduced corporate tax rates immediately, and then began to provide across-the-board cuts for individuals as well. For the few with unearned income from rents and interest, taxes were capped at 50 percent, and by 1986, when the second Reagan tax cuts went into effect, the taxes on those in the highest brackets were down to 28 percent. But it wasn't just cuts in welfare and taxes that made *caveat civis* so important economically. *Caveat civis* also meant that in the 1980s the "magic of the marketplace" was to be defended at all costs. Here too the citizen who most needed to beware was the one who had the fewest resources to rely on. In 1981, when PATCO, the air traffic controllers union, seemed about to pull off a successful strike, the president quickly intervened, firing all those who refused his order to return to work and at the same time making it clear that for the rest of the 1980s union busting would be acceptable whenever workers threatened profits. By contrast, in an era of mergers and acquisitions, the Reagan Justice Department went out of its way to assure Wall Street that it had nothing to worry about. Of the 10,723 merger notifications the antitrust division received between 1981 and 1987, it challenged just 26.

By the end of the 1980s, the economic realignment the Reagan legacy was designed to achieve was in place. The average real income of the top 5 percent of the population rose from $120,253 to $148,438 while the average real income of the poorest 20 percent fell from $9,990 to $9,431. The biggest beneficiaries of all were the superrich. The share of national income going to the wealthiest 1 percent rose from 8.1 percent in 1981 to 14.7 percent by 1986. Even more significant, in the economic sphere Reaganism eroded the political opposition. The 1986 tax bill, which contained a bubble that made the marginal rate of some taxpayers higher than that of millionaires, was passed with Democratic support, and by the 1988 elections, the Democrats were still afraid to make class politics an issue, insisting that "competence" rather than ideology was the most important question for the electorate.

"Reagan made the denial of compassion respectable," New York governor Mario Cuomo would later say. But it was not just inequity that *caveat civis* legitimized. It also redefined the nature of government service. Once upon a time the conservative ideal of government service was embodied in the selfless administrator who put aside expectations of personal gain and made service his contribution to the country. Under Reagan such selfless notions became the dreams of a naif. In the age of Reagan the new civil servant became the entitled guardian. If during his actual time in office he was expected to avoid using his position for profit, he was under no such restraint the minute he left government. In an administration that made the rich richer, the

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successful civil servant was someone who showed that the friends and influence he had acquired could be turned to personal advantage.

For longtime Reagan associate Michael Deaver, the deputy chief of staff at the White House, not even the Ethics in Government Act, which requires officials to wait one year before lobbying former colleagues, was an obstacle. Shortly after leaving the White House, Deaver set up a lobbying firm in Washington and soon was bringing clients to the White House tennis courts and doing business from a seat on Nancy Reagan's airplane. By the end of 1985, his first year out of government, Deaver had acquired $3.2 million in contracts from Boeing, Rockwell International, TWA, and CBS, as well as from Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Puerto Rico. It was, however, Deaver's work in South Korea that best sums up how he was able to make the role of entitled guardian work for him. Two months after leaving the White House, Deaver went to Seoul on behalf of Philip Morris Inc., bringing with him a message that U.S. Ambassador Richard Walker wanted to hear—the president had decided to extend his term as ambassador. With Walker's assistance Deaver was then able to meet virtually every member of the South Korean cabinet, and by the time he was ready to return to America, his contacts had paid off. He was able to get Philip Morris the Korean tobacco concessions it wanted as well as secure for himself a $475,00 contract from the Korean Cultural Society and a $250,000 contract from a Korean industrial complex.

Deaver would later be convicted of lying to Congress about his lobbying activities, but his conviction would only highlight how profitable his lobbying had been and do nothing to deter other Reagan officials from skirting the law. In 1989 a congressional investigation into the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Department scandals would reveal that former Secretary of the Interior James Watt, no expert on housing, had earned $420,000 for eight phone calls and one thirty-minute meeting with HUD chief Samuel Pierce. Asked to describe himself in action, a smiling Watt replied, "There's a skilled, talented man who uses his credibility to accomplish his task." Like Deaver before him, Watt had no qualms about what he was entitled to as an ex-government official or about the ethics of making personal contacts gained from government service the decisive factor in doing business.

Perhaps if the president had spoken out? Perhaps if he had shown anger at the scandals surrounding those who had worked for him? Then matters might have been different. But nobody in the Reagan administration so personified the entitled guardian as Ronald Reagan himself. Less than a year after leaving office, he and his wife accepted $2 million from the Fujisankei Communications Group for making a nine-day goodwill trip through Japan. The trip, arranged by longtime Reagan friend Charles Wick, the former director of the United States Information Agency, was, however, merely icing on the cake for the president and his wife.

While still in the White House the president showed how thoroughly he believed in the concept of the entitled guardian. In 1986 twenty of his friends set up a concern, Wall Management Services, and chipped in $2.5 million to buy the Reagans a retirement house in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles. Like the house in Sacramento that a group of Reagan friends bought when he was governor of California, the Bel Air house, with its option for the Reagans to lease or buy, was a bargain. For the Reagans, there was, however, no acknowledgment that such a bargain might carry with it obligations. In their eyes the house was the kind of reward anybody who held high office might expect, a perk to be accepted with the ease that earlier had prompted the president to quip to reporters, "Never look a gift house in the mouth."

In a less ideological administration *caveat civis* would not have gone beyond this point. But among Reagan officials, entitlement meant not only that it was appropriate to make a profit from government service but that in the name of the higher good the agencies they worked for should serve the goals of Reaganism, even when those goals conflicted with longstanding laws or express acts of Congress. As a result, the third and final phase of the Reagan legacy

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became executive nullification: the deliberate sabotaging of any government agency with a mandate different from the one the administration saw itself pledged to fulfill. As journalist Frances Fitzgerald shrewdly observed, "Grant and Harding officials came to Washington with no larger purpose in mind than that of looting the government. But among the most committed of the Reagan administration radicals there was often an interplay between ideology and greed, between breaking the law for the public as well as the private good."

For his role in the Iran-*contra* scandal, Oliver North became the best known of the Reagan saboteurs. In shredding documents the FBI was after, in lying to Congress, North's admitted flouting of the law was impossible to miss. But as North pointed out at his trial, there was every reason for him to believe that he was acting with Ronald Reagan's approval. He not only had the encouragement of superiors who were in direct contact with the White House, he had the evidence (from Saudi Arabia's secret deposits of $2 million a month in the *contra* bank account of Adolfo Calero) of the role the administration was playing in getting around the ban that Congress, through the 1984 Boland amendment, had put on aid to the *contras*.

The activities of Oliver North were, however, no different from those that defined the executive nullification that characterized a series of government agencies during the Reagan years. Unable to dismantle the liberal governmental agencies it had inherited, the Reagan administration let them wither from within or changed their historic mission. At the scandal-plagued Housing and Urban Development Department the staff was allowed to shrink by more than 18 percent, and key positions were filled by political appointees hostile to the programs they administered. At the Justice Department, civil rights lawyers, taking their cue from the president, who sought to restore tax-exempt status to discriminatory private schools like Bob Jones University, refused to litigate the kinds of racial cases that in the past would have gotten immediate attention. At the Environmental Protection Agency, Rita Lavelle, chief of the toxic-wastes division, not only undermined agency regulations but did so for the benefit of the company for which she had previously worked. The Office of Human Development Services withheld millions of dollars in congressionally approved aid to abused children and elderly adults with chronic illnesses, and the Department of Health and Human Services went even further: it struck thousands of people off the Social Security disability-insurance rolls; then when individuals sued and were restored to the rolls, the department adopted a policy of noncompliance, refusing to admit that it should restore to its disability-insurance rolls all those with similar claims.

Why didn't such deliberate political sabotage upset the country while Ronald Reagan held office? In part the answer lies in his success as the "great communicator" and the impact of massive government spending (garrison Keynesianism) on the economy. For much of the 1980s, it was possible to believe that we could have a painless future, that no sacrifice was required to cure the nation's fiscal imbalance. The "magic of the market place," the Laffer curve, junk bonds—all suggested a world in which we could get rich without having to be accountable for our excesses. Moreover, so long as the victims of 1980s social change, whether unemployed factory workers or homeless mothers, could be blamed for their own fix, it was acceptable to ignore the widening gap between rich and poor.

We did not as a nation care that at the start of the 1980s the CEOs of the country's 300 largest companies made on average 29 times what the typical manufacturing worker did and that by the end of the decade the multiple had climbed to 93 to 1. In distancing government from the citizenry, Reaganism created an environment that distanced citizens from each

Man's Best Friend

Markets are man's best friend and, like man's best friend, they have to be kept on a leash, followed with a pooper scooper, and sometimes muzzled.

—Lenny Glynn

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other. Even the language of Reaganism gained widespread acceptance. The civil rights movement was now a "special interest." A strikebreaker was now a "replacement worker."

The other half of the explanation for the success of Reaganism has, however, little to do with the "great communicator." It lies with the fears that gripped America at the start of the 1980s. After a decade of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, after Watergate, stagflation, and the Iranian hostage crisis, it was too depressing to think that Ronald Reagan might be as big a disappointment as his predecessors. We needed him to succeed. In the dream of America reborn that he offered us, we were codependents, bent on not seeing the Reagan flaws. The firsthand evidence of presidential lapses was impossible to miss. From David Stockman's insider account of Ronald Reagan's failure to understand his own budget proposals to television pictures of the president dozing off at meetings, it was clear that he was often distant from the government he presided over. But if we accepted these revelations at face value, then where was there to turn? Who was there to make things better?

For a brief moment after the Berlin Wall came tumbling down in November 1989, it seemed as if we might not have to pay for our codependency. We could acknowledge that, like a profligate grandfather, Ronald Reagan had spent more than he should, but we could also tell ourselves that the Reagan legacy had turned out all right. For there in the rubble of the Berlin Wall—like freshly minted dollars—was a peace divided. We could make the 1990s the payback decade and come out ahead of where we were when the 1980s began.

The optimism of 1989 is gone. Now as we struggle with the Reagan legacy, the future feels more uncertain than ever. At the start of the 1960s, when the limits of the New Deal became clear, the egalitarian framework on which it rested pointed the way to Head Start, Medicare, the Civil Rights Act. By contrast, Reaganism contains no compassionate next step. It always assumed that when the New Deal state was dismantled, the market, freed from overtaxation and too many rules, would rise up and save us. In the absence of that phoenix-like market, the Reagan legacy has nothing to offer. What we are left with instead is a sense of anomie—the ethic of *caveat civis*—that shaped the Reagan assault on the New Deal social contract, then became the perfect campaign slogan for George Bush, "*No new taxes!*" □

To Our Contributors:

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your ms—the mails aren't always reliable. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

(6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □

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Fred Siegel

WAITING FOR LEFTY

A Liberal Turn in Our Politics?

In *Waiting for Lefty*, the radical play of the 1930s, Clifford Odets's characters suffer not only from poverty but also from disintegrating families and a decline of individual honor. The audiences, caught up in a felt connection between their own plight and the play's version of the country's political failures, would often join the actors at the end in shouting "Strike! Strike!" American liberalism is these days experiencing its own "Waiting for Lefty"—waiting to forge a bond between political actors and the electorate. In the nearly ten years since the high-water mark of "The Reagan Revolution," Lefty's return has been predicted not only by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., inheritor of his father's well-known theory that American history goes through alternating cycles of conservatism and liberalism, but repeatedly by others writing from a wide variety of perspectives.

In 1980 Schlesinger foresaw that "sometime in the 1980s" the "dam" holding back "commitment and uplift will break" and issue forth in a new burst of civic energy. In 1986 predictions of a liberal revival began in earnest with "Hands Across America," a celebrity-studded walk to dramatize poverty.

Despite a record low turnout, liberal victories in the 1986 congressional elections were hailed as proof that the pendulum was set to swing. The 1986 elections, wrote James Reichly, "have lifted the Democrats out of the morass of depression that has beset them since 1978." The strong liberal showing suggested to Reichly the beginnings of a post-Reagan politics. *Washington Post* reporter Paul Taylor argued that "the axis of resentment" was now shifting from "big government to big business." In the late 1980s corporate America, which had enjoyed a 70 percent approval rating a decade earlier, plummeted to a mere 35 percent, according to a Harris poll. Reagan, argued pollster William Schneider, had ironically "restored faith in government," setting the stage for a revival of activist liberalism.

In 1987 historian Robert MacElvaine caught the new spirit in his book *The End of Conservative America: Liberalism After Reagan* by quoting Governor Michael Dukakis on how "this second Reagan term reminds me so much of the second Eisenhower term that it's almost uncanny." "It was time," said Dukakis, "for something new, some energy, some vitality." Pointing to social decay in the cities and the loss of economic competitiveness, Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt exclaimed that "it almost scares me to think how much the current period is like the late 1950s." Citing Yankelovich polls, *Time* wrote in March 1987 of a ground swell of support for shifting money "away from the military and toward the unsolved problems of health, housing, homelessness and education."

Dukakis and Babbitt weren't entirely off the mark. It's now been almost forgotten that 1987 and 1988 did seem like a reprise of Eisenhower's second term.

By 1987 Reagan no longer had a domestic agenda, while in the wake of the Iran-*contra* scandal, Speaker of the House Jim Wright seized control of American policy toward Nicaragua. And while Reagan was being humiliated by the rejection of Robert Bork as his nominee to the Supreme Court, even his

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very successes in foreign policy seemed to be working against him. With the collapse of communism, anticommunism, the one issue that had kept libertarian and communitarian conservatives in harness, was fading away—as was the probability of continuing big budgets for the military, the Republicans' chief source of patronage.

With Reagan facing the end of his effectiveness, conservatives seemed lost. While careerist conservative activists were bailing out of politics to cash in on their White House connections, true believers were dismayed to discover that after seven years of Reagan the culture had remained "resolutely liberal and permissive." Faced with the Iran-*contra* scandal, the closing of the cold war, and the bitter recriminations over Bork, conservatives, complained former White House staffer Aram Bakshian, were behaving "like Siamese fighting fish, colorful scrappy little creatures who reserve their best efforts for maiming each other rather than taking on enemy species."

Kevin Phillips, a student of political cycles, argued that periods of conservative ascendancy tend to produce "capitalist blowoffs" that accentuate inequality. He predicted that a populist push for "community minded reform" was not far off. The dynamics of social resentment set off in the sixties, said Phillips, were running out of steam. The conservative cycle that had been powered by a distaste for racial minorities was about to be replaced, argued both Phillips and *Time*, by a new cycle set in motion by disgust with growing disparities of wealth and privilege. The problem with the country, said Richard Gephardt on the 1987 presidential campaign trail, was that the fat cats "reward themselves with huge bonuses during the good times, but console themselves with layoffs as soon as times turn bad."

A new alignment seemed at hand. Yet Lefty hasn't arrived. What happened?

Initially the comparison with Eisenhower's second term seemed to hold. As in the late 1950s, the conservative collapse was matched with a liberal revival. The liberal resurgence of the late 1950s was largely labor driven, and the liberal victories of 1986 were similarly sustained by the unions, which, despite their loss of membership, had become more important than ever in a Democratic party largely without organizational muscle. Business, caught by surprise, seemed reconciled, after its sweeping antilabor victories in the Reagan years, to losing a few rounds. Referring to the big buildup of unmet needs, a General Electric (GE) vice president acknowledged, Schlesinger-like, that "there was a pent up need to legislate."

The legislation the GE veep was referring to was coming out of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, where the new chair, Ted Kennedy, was, thanks to his collaboration with organized labor, ready to launch some new initiatives. The "new agenda for social progress in America," tagged as "workers' rights legislation," included plant-closing notification, job-hazard notification, minimum-wage increases, minimum health benefits for all employees, and mandatory unpaid parental leave when a child is born or adopted.

Kennedy and his aides approached each of these issues almost flawlessly. They avoided a call for new or enlarged bureaucracies. They insisted on the need not just to spend more but to set priorities. They didn't demand new spending and thus new taxes. Through what was described as "low-cost social justice," the use of targeted or dedicated spending, self-financing programs, off-budget expenditures, and mandated benefits, the Kennedy agenda managed to address a broad range of needs and constituencies without stirring up the standard fears about liberal activism.

Some of the new agenda, like self-financed catastrophic health insurance for the elderly, failed in part because of poor legislative craftsmanship and old-fashioned interest-group greed. But the rest, including such reasonable measures as giving workers advance notification of plant closings and requiring *unpaid* parental leave, were beaten back with presidential vetoes. Yet even those defeats seemed to contain the seeds of future victories. Plant-closing and parental-leave legislation, both broadly popular, promised to provide a platform for contesting the 1988 presidential elections.

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If the 1988 contest had been carried out on the same playing field on which John Kennedy had won in 1960, the Democrats would have been able to gain enough public support to win the White House. Again, if the United States was still demographically and socially the country that had elected JFK, the 1988 elections could have been the start of something big.

Had the two strongest sources of liberal and Democratic electoral support—the trade unions and the cities—represented the same proportion of the population in 1988 as they had in 1960, Dukakis probably would have won narrowly. But the precipitous drop in American manufacturing employment—the United States lost two million manufacturing jobs in the 1980s—came largely in districts dominated by Democrats. Trade unions have lost roughly four million members since 1975. Union membership declined by nearly three-quarters of a million in 1984–85 alone. Membership may have now bottomed out at roughly 15 percent of the work force (only 12 percent in private industry), the lowest percentage among the major industrialized nations. The full extent of this decline has been masked in part by the growth of unions among government employees, whose interests in redistribution are often at odds with the growth-oriented emphasis of unionists in the private sector. The net effect is that despite their clout in the low-turnout off-year congressional elections, the unions are a much diminished force when it comes to defining the national political agenda.

New York Mayor David Dinkins likes to speak of urban America as "the heart and soul of the nation." But compared to the suburbs, which saw employment jump by 25 percent in the 1980s while urban areas lost 30 percent of their jobs, the cities are a rapidly shrinking political force. In the eighties, as poverty became more firmly implanted in the big cities, ten of the eleven cities with large black communities experienced sharp population declines. Detroit lost nearly 20 percent of its people. In 1960 Chicago, crucial to JFK's election, represented more than 40 percent of the Illinois vote; today it is 25 percent. Baltimore, which once cast almost one out of every two presidential votes in Maryland, now accounts for little more than one in ten. But even that 10 percent figure overestimates Baltimore's clout, because its residents earn on average less than half of what their suburban counterparts make.

The mass political movements of this century, beginning with the rural revolt of the Populists and moving on to the New Deal insurgency of the industrial unions and the cities, were based on strong identities of interest created by a nexus of common work and communal concerns. But the new political center of the country is in the generally anti- or apolitical (but presidentially Republican) suburbs—settlements defined by secession from the common concerns of the cities. Between 1968 and 1988 millions fled the disorder of the cities; the suburban secession grew from 36 percent to 48 percent of the presidential vote.

And now, 1992 is likely to be the first election with a suburban majority. For at least a decade the suburban shift has had enough momentum to feed on itself. Ronald Reagan, elected with overwhelming suburban majorities, moved effectively to weaken the ties between city and federal government, central to American liberalism since FDR enraged the nation's governors in 1933 by directly funneling highway funds to the cities. Reagan's revenue-sharing program sent money once earmarked for the cities to the suburban-dominated state governments that have by and large proceeded to cut the cities' share of federal monies. In some cases, as in Philadelphia, those cuts plus a generous helping of local incompetence have sent cities into near bankruptcy.

When Philadelphia's African-American mayor, William Goode, turned to the state for relief from a crisis initiated in part in Washington and Harrisburg, he was rudely rebuffed. He found that a finger-waving state government dominated by suburban Democrats and rural Republicans and egged on by disaffected ethnic Democrats refused to help. Instead the anti-Philadelphia coalition—even more antiblack than anti-urban—has been only too happy to see Philadelphia's collapse as an example of liberal failure.

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Separatism initiated by blacks is subject to censure; but many suburbanites are as separatist as any black nationalist, only more subtly so. When Governor Jim Florio of New Jersey tried to use a progressive income tax to rejuvenate inner-city education, he became the most unpopular governor in recent memory. In New Jersey middle- and upper-middle-class white separatism is expressed both in terms of partly legitimate distrust of government's effectiveness and an unwillingness to share tax revenues with "them," the poor from whom they fled in the first place.

Among the dependent individualists of the suburbs, community is defined not so much by close ties with one's neighbors and community organizations—those have eroded rapidly over the past quarter century—but by *who is kept out*. The suburbs are not so much Republican as anti-urban, and thus anti-Democratic.

The fastest growing form of government in the suburbs is the homeowners association presiding over covenanted communities—essentially private towns operating outside the purview of the Fourteenth Amendment. In return for erecting a bastion against the problems of the metropolis, "citizens" of the private towns agree to a "covenanted conformity" that dictates everything from the size of their mailboxes to the type and number of visitors permitted. Estimated to include as many as twenty million people, these covenanted communities generally establish "one dollar–one vote governments" that recreate the pre-industrial world of power to the property holders.

While the cities are pitted against the suburbs, city dwellers are increasingly divided against themselves. In Milwaukee, a city with a long liberal and even socialist tradition, black and white blue-collar workers devastated by the decline of heavy manufacturing seem to have moved into separate realities. The whites, decreasingly Democratic, support the Republican governor's Learnfare program, which penalizes parents on welfare whose children are truant. Blacks are reviving the separatist spirit of Malcolm X. Mike McGee, a born-again Black Panther complete with Castro-style beard and revolutionary regalia, has, to great media fanfare, threatened violence if "changes" aren't made.

It's some measure of the cynicism now surrounding race relations that the changes being made garner support from both the Republican governor pushing Learnfare and one of McGee's prominent supporters, Polly Williams, who is promoting a plan to dismantle the public schools. Governor Thompson sees the opportunity to interject market mechanisms into education by giving out vouchers redeemable at a school of choice, public or private. Williams, a black nationalist, wants to put public monies to parochial ends by creating Afrocentric academies funded by the vouchers. Williams argues, with some justice, that the white suburbs are already operating what in effect are white private schools with public money.

Milwaukee is by no means unique in seeming to have given up on both integration and public institutions. In the 1940s the CIO's "Operation Dixie" tried to unionize the textile mills of the South in order to liberalize southern politics. Something like the reverse has now occurred. The southern problem has come North and racial divisions that for so long held back southern progress now hold the entire country—and for that matter the political cycle—at bay. The ostentatious inequalities of the Reagan years haven't brought on a progressive politics, in part, because the fight over racial issues in general and hiring quotas in particular has limited the possibilities for political renewal.

The disparity between personal prosperity and public poverty is driven home daily to residents of big cities who search and search to find a public phone that's working even as others cruise by in cars talking on their hand-held cellular phones. The privatization of public life has been attributed in part to the ability of the wealthy to simply buy their way out of public services, but the privatization extends far beyond the suburban and the wealthy. It's now common in the big cities for middle-class neighborhoods—whether black, white, or, as in my own, integrated—to rely on private police, private bus services, private schools, and private recreation. Perhaps even

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more important is that the residents of middle-class neighborhoods are also protected by private health and social insurance systems, benefits that come with their jobs, so that the collapse of public hospitals is another crisis from which they've largely insulated themselves.

Government itself is sometimes directly complicit in this growing privatization. In New York developers despairing of the city government's ability to provide that most basic of public services—safety on the streets—have built vast new developments like Battery Park City, which are in effect limited-access private cities, the urban counterparts of the covenanted suburbs. On a small scale, neighborhoods have turned to "special purpose taxes," for "special service districts"—in effect, limited private governments to provide services like street cleaning and police protection that the city itself is unable to supply. The net effect, writes John DiIulio, is that "we're moving away from a system that registers concern for general equity in the distribution of government services, toward a market system where citizens are treated very differently within the same jurisdiction based on their ability to pay."

The "special service districts" can be seen as a metaphor for the political system as a whole. Government and the public arena are not regarded by most Americans as vehicles to achieve worthwhile common goals; they are simply assumed to be public means to private ends. The notion that governments, and government employees, are "in business for themselves" is simply taken as a fact of life. In the New York City school system, for instance, it is widely understood that the schools are opened and closed not in accord with the needs of students and neighborhoods but at the pleasure of the custodians "union." The custodians are essentially public entrepreneurs who in the name of city services are in business for themselves.

When the superintendent of a New York school district was asked why in the midst of recent layoffs additional money had been appropriated for a school drop-out prevention program that had proved to be an abject failure, he replied anonymously: "This money is just to feed fat cows and let them get fatter."

The drop-out prevention patronage program of the New York schools was protected because of the political clout of its backers, but the nonaccountability now routinely associated with government spending is sometimes imposed for the best of reasons. Money for Special Education, that is, education for children deemed to be handicapped with severe learning, physical, or emotional problems, now covers 12 percent of all students and 23 percent of the school budget in New York City. Yet its benefits are at best uncertain. Part of the "Rights Revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s, Special Education became mandated in 1978 after a federal judge, citing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1973, ordered a customized response to children with special problems. Protected from public scrutiny and democratic debate by having been juridically defined as an absolute right, the money mandated by the federal government for Special Education has become a swamp of nonaccountability.

Operating under court protection, Special Education has spawned a bureaucracy of psychologists, paraprofessionals, social workers, and teachers who need not account for their efforts. Jack Pollack, principal of Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, notes, "If the results justified the expense and the paper work it would be all right, but nobody has verified whether it does." These jobs, he explains, cannot be abolished unless the judge who ordered the program modifies his ruling. The net effect is that at a time when teachers in New York are being laid off, Special Education teachers are still being hired—as in a Brooklyn school where, despite overcrowded classes, a full-time teacher fluent in Cambodian is being hired for a single Cambodian student.

A politics purged of public purpose by self-serving government and court-ordered insulation has helped to sever the connection between the populace and the political process. "People don't feel any sense of ownership over the federal government," says Democratic pollster Geoffrey Garin. "It isn't them, and it

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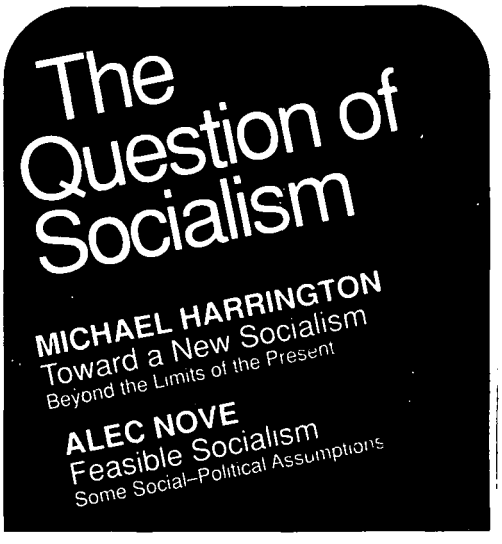
isn't theirs." Voters, as repeated surveys suggest, believe, and with reason, that their choices count for less and less. The distance between the populace and its purported representatives is summed up by a San Franciscan who complained that government "seems like another world to me. It goes on, it functions, but I don't feel like it really directly affects us." It is these sorts of sentiments, what one recent survey described as "the astonishing indifference to politics and elections," that makes a full-scale liberal revival seem unlikely in the near future.

There is something inherently optimistic about the cyclical theory of American politics. It suggests, in effect, that no matter what changes take place, a turn in the wheel of fortune can be counted on. But, short of a revival of our cities and other institutions of social solidarity, there is little reason to assume that the next set of social shocks—whether they come from a severe recession or military setbacks—will produce Lefty's long-awaited return. Increasingly cut off as we are from one another not only by the sharpening social stratification of the Reagan years but also by the therapeutic "politics of personal identity," there is not much reason to assume that the near future will bring a return to a liberal politics based on common concerns. At least right now, the outlook for America seems best described not as a cycle of renewal but as a slow drift downward. This is not exactly good news, but it is, I fear, the truth. □



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The Question of Socialism:

Essays by Michael Harrington and Alec Nove

First published as articles in *Dissent*, these pieces contribute to the ongoing debate about socialism and markets.

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Jim Chapin

SYMPTOMS OF DECLINE

Brief Notes on a Big Subject

It is obvious that feelings of decline are now widespread in a way that they were not in the past. Without exception, everyone that I have asked about whether America is in decline has said yes, regardless of his or her political stance, age, occupation, or social position. A wave of palpable unease has spread across the United States.

The self-appointed defenders of present-day America against the "declinists" tend to stress the collapse of our enemies, but historically, the collapse of one's enemies is not necessarily a victory. There are many cases in history where both rivals collapsed simultaneously: Sassanian Persia and the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman and the Spanish Empires, the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, and so on. One of the early signs of the collapse of the communist societies was the decline in life expectancy and health care. Recent headlines in the United States suggest that we are going through a similar phenomenon.

The United States government was set up to be inefficient (as any perusal of the Federalist Papers would show); yet somehow successive generations of Americans are disturbed by the ever-new discovery that we have a fragmented, irresponsible, and ungovernable polity.

Despite this ideologically determined opposition to government, the fear of a political class has not prevented its rise. But what has resulted is what Theodore Lowi calls a "jellyfish" government, pervasive but weak, and easily captured by private interests. Where else but America would the "industrial" side of the "military-industrial complex" be stronger than the "military" side?

The American political system has always been badly designed to deal with real internal conflict: consider that we were the only country that fought a war over abolishing slavery because we made it a local condition. The only way in which the United States has been able to reorganize itself is with an enemy: whatever social engineering we've had in our history has come during or just after the major catastrophes of war and depression.

It is an oddity of the present situation that now, in its moment of triumph, capitalism resembles the Marxist prediction of creeping immiseration, inequality, and bourgeois sham politics more than it did during the cold war. Or maybe it's not so strange. In the absence of a broad-based movement against inequality (of which Marxism was always a component), does democratic capitalism work?

Anti-Marxism remains the best defense of capitalism, a negative defense indeed, one that rests on the old Condorcet principle that the job of conservatives is to "enlist nature in the service of inequality." In other words, the best defense of capitalism is a denial of other possibilities.

However, this is not a sufficient defense, for long, of any system. In the absence of an objective critique, how does capitalism survive? When one debated Marxists, the issues had measurable outcomes, but when one debates the advocates of "ethnicity and nature" (the new equivalent of "blood and soil"?), facts are unimportant. How does one deal with fundamentalist Moslems, tree-worshippers, or racists? If the bourgeois world is seen as the

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only rational one, then only subjectivism can be a defense against it.

The alternative "rationalistic" approach of Marxist analysis was always weaker in the United States than elsewhere, which explains why our native anticapitalism has taken such exotic forms. The outside threat of Marxism not only kept capitalists "honest" but also put bounds on the nature of capitalist competition. We may well have to re-enter the debate between Schumpeter and Lenin as to whether business society is by nature peaceful or warlike.

American students rank near the bottom of the world in skills but at the very top in self-esteem. Yet our formula for self-improvement is always more self-esteem, not more knowledge. This gives a certain strange quality to discussions of American education.

In recent years the main feature of this education has been the mass creation of special groups of interlocuters who stand at society's gates. The most important professions are the greedy triumvirate of doctors, lawyers, and bankers (the three described by bartenders as the lowest tippers). Each has a metaphor that applies to all life: therapy, law, and transaction. The doctor, the lawyer, and the banker want to stand at the intersection of every human encounter. The language of these three professions uses traditional American phrases that have come to describe most American experience: "self-help," "rights," and the "bottom line."

Education becomes therapy tempered by law and money. It is this that explains humanities professor Jerry Herron's paradox: "All we specialists are presiding over a mess which might lead a person to wonder why the widest dispersal of professional culture in human history has produced not a literate society but an illiterate one, presided over institutionally by professionals apparently incapable of teaching what they profess."

The primary social function of schools is as a credentialing agent for the middle classes. The dominant style of education at all levels is an "evasive and non-communicating pluralism." College teachers are hired to do one thing but promoted on the basis of another. They have created a two-tier system, with a protected minority at the top and a seasonally constituted labor force doing most of the actual work. To make up for this reality, they have adopted the contradictory message enunciated by Herron: "If you study English you will learn how to see through corporate culture while still qualifying for a job at IBM." This debunking style is now a permanent side of mass American life. It is hard to get rid of, though by now it is simply an attitude signifying nothing and debunking nothing.

At the top level, a theoretically left-wing professoriat engages in the "mock subversion of an embittered proletariat." They are busy instructing their students in fancy language about the irrelevance of canonical texts that the students haven't read, repeating their own experience to a generation that knows nothing and cares nothing about it. By forcing their students to read things in order to "see through them," they are engaging in what Herron calls "pure—if coded—autobiography." We are faced with the odd spectacle of the people who cried for relevance in the world of the sixties now dominating the campuses with a discourse that no one understands.

The predatory fragmentation of the university mirrors the similar fragmentation of the general society. And it leaves even those who disagree with the direction of affairs little escape, for they must attempt to return to tradition with an attack on those who should be agents of that tradition.

The cynicism at the top levels of academia has seeped down to lower levels and seeped out horizontally. The scholasticism of private writing in little-read journals impedes even business and law schools. Based on my younger son's experiences at Stuyvesant High School in New York City, English as a discipline no longer exists even at elite public high schools. It is rather a series of private experiences, each teacher with some subjective message. Even bright students spend most of their time trying to decipher this message, which is unconnected to any that they have heard before or will hear again. At lower levels we have simply let public schools decay.

Edward Luttwak complains of the "third worldization" of American culture, the decline of habits of competence and discipline. He argues that whereas once Americans were

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assumed to be more efficient than the rest of the world, now we are assumed to be less efficient. We take for granted that no one will do a good job. In a service society why we can't get any service?

In fact, this argument is unfair to actual Third World immigrants, who bring the bourgeois ethic here when they come and lose it by the fourth generation. Indeed, one could almost suggest a "four-generation problem" first discovered by Henry Adams. America might well have been living off immigrant vitality for the last century. Here, too, the American ethic may be more inspiring at a distance than close up: we may be a society incapable of replicating itself, dependent on other societies for our continuance.

The collapse of the legal system is as bad as that of the educational system (and not unrelated!). Americans have always used law as a substitute for ideology. In recent years law has become a way of securing a protected place outside the rough and tumble of interest-group politics: "Litigation is the grotesque offspring of regulation." As George Will suggested, we have "miniaturized" questions of ethics into a matter of small rules (Jim Wright's book royalties) rather than what it should be: the great matters of how we organize our society. One result is that the already unique nature of American government, pervasive but weak, has been exacerbated. The United States political process is unique in the world for its domination by lawyers.

In recent years it has become clear that the "good old cause" of "negative liberty," with its unwillingness to cede power to anyone, means power ceded to everyone. The American fear of state intervention leads to a style of hidden intervention, which causes distrust.

The domination of recent politics by legal issues and practices is the likely cause of the strange abandonment of our traditional pragmatism. The extremism of legal decisions setting questions outside the political realm is shown by a recent comment of the *Economist* that other countries have managed to arrive at compromise positions on abortion but Americans can imagine nothing but all abortions or none. It is the focus on abstract intellectual positions that leads to "slippery slope" arguments that make *any* loss a *total* one.

The last decade has shown (if demonstration was needed) that the right is as capable of generating abstract intellectuals and crackpot theorists as the left. For ideological fanatics, reality is interesting only insofar as it proves their theories. They have "no interest in arriving at either truth or consensus." The willingness to ruin rather than let the other side rule is in part a result of habits developed when security and wealth seemed free. And it is also a result of the politics of the sixties: if your ideas are somehow yourself, if the personal is political and the political is personal, any disagreement with someone must perforce be a personal attack. In order to persuade someone, you have to start with some idea of the common interest or ethos to which you can appeal. In their absence, all that is left is either force or unprincipled bargaining. Perhaps this helps explain the increasing verbal violence of our political campaigns.

Victory over domestic foes is more important than the national interest or even than reality. Indeed both sides regularly lie with statistics by setting different years for comparisons or using family income without mentioning that family size has gone down or per capita income without mentioning changes in distribution. Conservatives rejoice in Reagan deficits because they prevent social programs (although, as Daniel Moynihan suggests, it is "unpatriotic to destroy America in order to save it"). It does not bother them that the criminalization of drugs has flooded the criminal justice system. Liberals are more concerned about the civil liberties of crack addicts and criminals than the safety of average citizens. The moral aspect of our gridlock is a consequence of this division. This may reflect the corruption of our discourse during the years of cold war, when intellectuals on both sides used any weapon at hand to defend or attack the policies of nation states.

Conservatives called feudal killers budding entrepreneurs, liberals called Stalinist murderers social democrats, and centrists called

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corrupt oligarchs aspiring democrats. By now advocates don't even care if their arguments are consistent: pro-abortion women have had no problem adopting a "view of private property as giving the owner laissez-faire rights . . . at odds with leftist positions on property as holding social responsibility" or in suddenly re-creating the idea of a "women's sphere" by calling abortion solely a women's issue. The same right-wingers who claim that a visit from an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) inspector violates civil liberties find no problem in applying urine tests and polygraph tests to the population at large.

The images of professional sports purveyed through the mass media have become basic to our modes of social organization (as evidenced, for example, in self-help books). Professional sports and the law both operate in a system of short-term, results-oriented behavior in which rules are an impediment to be maneuvered around. And this conception of sports was derived from and fed back into our conception of economic competition.

In amateur sports the key metaphor was the "rules of the game," but in professional sports and the mass media winning rather than rule-keeping is the key metaphor. Most of the self-help books stress that the key metaphor for men in corporations is professional team sports. Media coverage of elections and of politics has adopted the same metaphor. "Gamesmanship" is something to be admired, so much so that it was held against Michael Dukakis that Lee Atwater and Roger Ailes were able to smear him successfully.

As high-stakes legal games become the center of political confrontation, the result is at once a confrontation leading to gridlock and the loss of the sense of moral seriousness of ideas. The moral education resulting from this combination of events is an odd mixture of bad social science and sports-type coverage, which together disempower the value of systems and behavior.

At this moment, while much of the world is searching for things that Americans have always had, Americans seem to be on their way to losing them. For Americans, our victory in the cold war has resembled the end of a sporting event (which is what the cold war was for most Americans). We could ignore our own failings in the exhilaration of the contest, but now the event is over and we have to come home and confront them. And Americans are apprehensive about the next contest: we knew we could "beat" Russia in a military race but are very uncertain that we can beat Germany and Japan in an economic one.

The problem of the marketplace society is that the only part of the society that cannot be left to the market is the rulemaker of the market. Capitalism prospered because capitalist metaphors had not yet taken over everything. Where to find the unmoved mover; who sets the rules for the players in the market? Abandoning the search destroys the entire system.

Capitalism abroad (and even here) has taken on some of the aspects of a cargo cult: if one worships at the right shrine, one will be rewarded. Unfortunately, these putative worshippers have no idea of how great is the ability of capitalists to take advantage of all the sacrifices made to them. And the brutal history of how people were taught to function in capitalist societies has been forgotten. Finally, capitalists have always needed governmental remedies for managerial folly.

The definition of capitalism as a rational *endeavor* certainly misses the irrational side of capitalism so obvious in the vast failures of the 1980s. Markets are not always rational nor do they always reward competence. Even in Horatio Alger stories the capitalist problem was solved by the lucky break: Ragged Dick somehow met the millionaire, but now the model is winning the lottery, a model that allows nothing for human effort. Another sign of the declining belief in the efficacy of capitalist solutions is the rising popularity of fantasy and the declining popularity of science fiction. Human agency is replaced by a supernatural one.

One aspect of decline is new: the relative poverty of many Americans themselves. As late as 1981 America was the world's leading creditor nation, with net assets of $141 billion; by 1989 we had a net debt of more than $700 billion. In these years the personal savings rate

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dropped 50 percent, real wages fell, and the national debt quadrupled. Three parts of the national budget (interest payments and the two boondoggle areas of agriculture and defense) together increased 117 percent, while the rest of the budget stagnated. American income has now stagnated for a longer period than ever before.

The difference between our society and other advanced societies is not at the top (if anything our top is higher than theirs) but at the bottom. Their poor are better off than ours. The average income per American family has not grown since 1973. But the rising expectations of the upper class and the upper-middle class have not reflected this reality. They have had enough power to continue increasing the starting salaries of lawyers, the average compensations of doctors, teachers, and bureaucrats, and the skyrocketing compensations of corporate executives. The expected compensation for many of these jobs has doubled in the past seventeen years. But if the mean income of families has not changed, the result must be a growing inequality.

Those who have been the beneficiaries of this upward income redistribution no doubt feel entitled to it ("we work hard for our money"). Or they may feel that "some people" cannot compete as well as they can. This is no doubt true. But I have always found the discovery that the losers of society are losers to be unremarkable. We should at least ask if the penalty for their "failings" should be hunger, homelessness, disease, and death. Even more, we should consider whether this is an appropriate fate for their children. Already there are hundreds of thousands of children in this country who are *born* drug addicts.

It may well be that the illusion of progress in the years 1850 to 1950 rested on three temporary phenomena: the change from rural to urban settlement; a change in the class structure, which created many kinds of new middle-class jobs; and the liberation of those most likely to be able to move upward. In this period, it was easy to take for granted the effects of spreading order and literacy. Also, during this period the environment was "free."

The end of these developments has a particular significance for American society because Americans have always believed that the decline of their institutions didn't matter as long as the quality of life of individual Americans was improving. Until about 1965 it was. Since then, however, American individuals have been losing their ability and the desire to compete in any of the marketplaces, whether economic, intellectual, social, or moral.

Because America has been synonymous with wealth for a quarter of a millennium, these changes are not insignificant. So far we have tried to compensate for the loss of wealth with maldistribution, and this may serve to continue to attract immigrants. If the ship is sinking, those in the bilge drown first. So far the people in first class are glancing downward and remarking on the stupidity of the people drowning below! Many of our characteristics as a nation are the habits of careless wealth, just as the British belief in "muddling through" came from *their* past wealth.

Economic failure is treated more harshly in the United States than in most of the advanced world. This harshness might be justified (practically, if not morally) if it were linked to greater success for the United States than for most of the advanced world. The sad truth is that in 1990's America the degraded condition of the bottom of our society has not resulted in a social economy more advanced or more competitive than those of Europe or Japan.

As political scientist Joel Krieger puts it: "American cities . . . are without question the most deteriorated of all the cities of the advanced societies." Ancient ills such as drink, tuberculosis, and homelessness have reappeared cheek-by-jowl with new ones such as AIDS, crack, and semi-automatic weapons. Had a foreign enemy created the South Bronx it would have been a cause for war; but because "we" did it to ourselves, it is seen as an act of "nature."

But it is not just the bottom of a society that tests its nature: in some ways the worst part of a social order is when it wastes or, worse, perverts the talents of many of its potential "best and brightest," turning them into yuppie junk bond salesmen, corporate lawyers, or, for some of the brightest in American ghettos, drug entrepreneurs.

A culture without rituals that has lost any

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unifying force except the mass media has few ways to deal with its fears. Some of the sense of strain in the society can be seen in the continued multiplication of guns, the loss of public space, the disintegration of society even in the suburbs. The psychology of work seems to be drifting toward the psychology of "lotto." The moral marketplace of hedonic capitalism is a very uncertain place to be. The middle class declines, not just in numbers but in self-confidence.

However, although Americans seem to be suffering at the moment from a loss of faith in the ability of the human mind to solve problems, historical expectations and roles, once learned, are not easily forgotten. So it is that Americans are generically optimistic and Russians the opposite. Experience over hundreds of years has taught Americans in general that tomorrow will be better and Russians that it might quite possibly be worse.

It should be noted that it has long been a characteristic of both intellectuals and the upper classes to make pragmatic arguments for absolutes as a way of keeping the social order intact and the masses controlled. But whether in the name of religion or something else, this job cannot be done cynically: an elite that doesn't believe its own principles can't inculcate them in others. For most of human history, indeed, liberty was a luxury good available only to the top of society, but such a restriction is no longer possible.

Despite setbacks, we need to remember that life has gotten better for a majority of human beings throughout this century. That is a gain that can continue only if we continue to make that improvement a priority. And *that* is not just a moral struggle but a practical one and therefore a political one.

To quote philosopher Robert Adams:

> In the measure that we can see [societies] as decadent, it was their imperviousness that made them so. The government's financial problems were not the heart of the matter. Governments have been known to declare bankruptcy, reorganize, and pull out of their difficulties. But the attitude of "don't know and don't care" on the part of society's most privileged classes was deadly. It is an attitude to which two-tier economies, such as we seem to be developing in the U.S., are enduringly prone.

It is possible to decline without falling, and it is possible to fall without declining. A decline may be relative or absolute. Finally, not all forms of decline go hand in hand. Some of the best art the Western Roman Empire produced was in the fifth and sixth centuries. As for the United States, it is so isolated and strong that the Olney Fiat* still applies. Almost no decline could lead to a fall.

It is possible that the weakness of our present institutions and the vacuity of our present ideas might produce a healthy reaction. But it might also be that Reaganism itself may have been only a symptom of a larger phenomenon. Once reason served as a check on appetite; now it seems more a goad to it. Despite ever-increasing rhetoric about "community," it is possible that people everywhere and most especially in America may want only the life of individual consumption: a nation of couch potatoes.

If the real goal of the mass of the people is social isolation, not community, then indeed we would be on our way to a new form of nomadic civilization. The decline of urban public space, left to bureaucrats and criminals, would be its logical expression. In the absence of other restraints, cohesions, and organizing principles, the coercion of the marketplace becomes necessary and even valued. The same nation that fears government power allows private corporations to fire people because they smoke or are overweight.

In the end the problem remains the definition of America. We are still a society in formation. Characteristically Americans love change, but see their future only as an improved version of the past. It may be that a community such as Elmhurst in Queens, where an incredibly varied population drawn from seventy-two different nations lives peacefully jumbled together, could be a model for the future world society. Or it might be

* Secretary of State Richard Olney to Ambassador James Bayard, July 20, 1895: "To-day the United States is practically sovereign upon this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition. Why? It is not . . . because wisdom and justice and equity are the invariable characteristics of the dealings of the United States. It is because . . . its infinite resources combined with its isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable as against any or all other powers."

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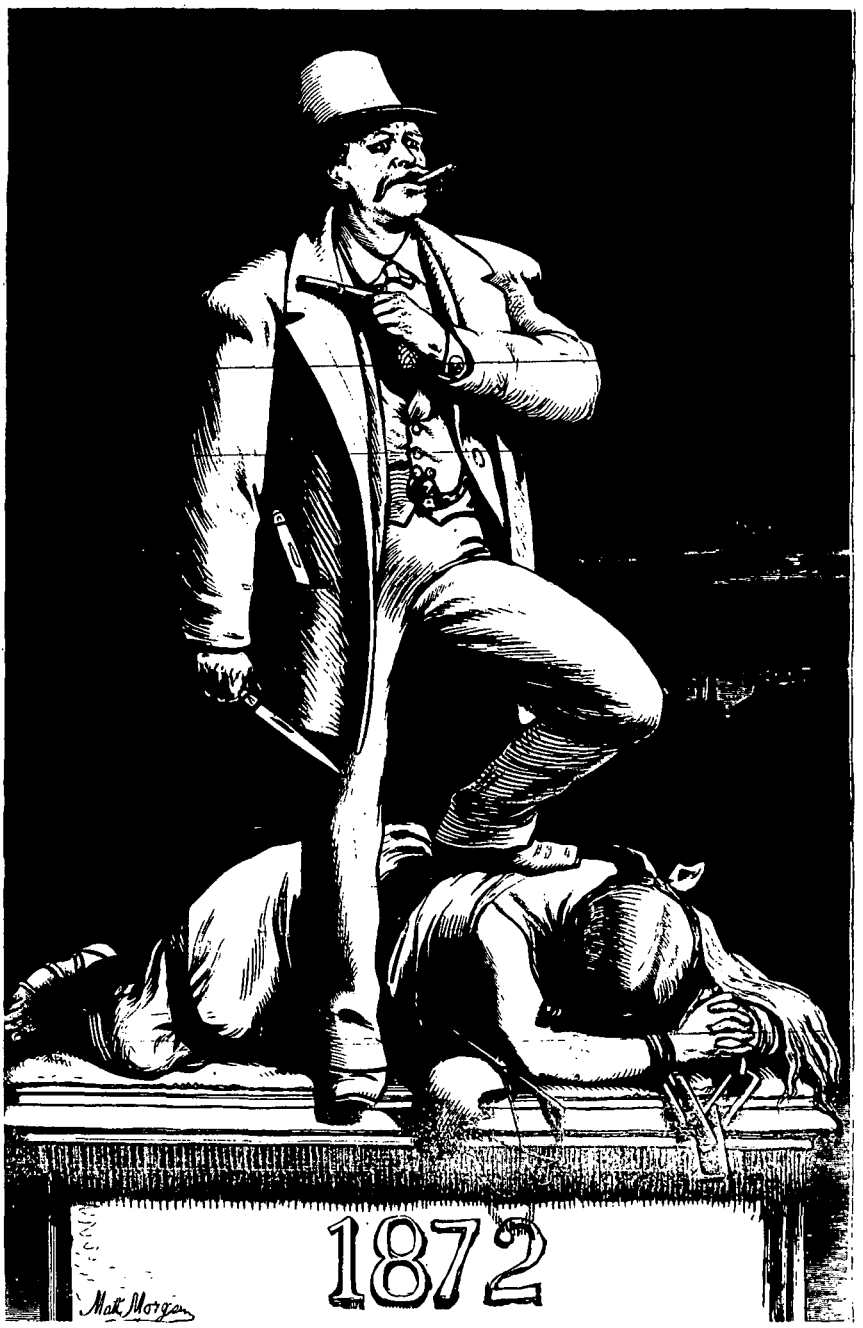

RUFFIANISM TRIUMPHANT: Design for a statue to be erected in New York commemorating the year 1872. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* Vol.35—January 4, 1873

that the decline of institutions has gone so far as to imperil the basic social structures necessary to provide for the well-being of individuals. But the building or rebuilding of such structures and a clear cultural identity requires thought and contestation. Whatever the consensus of America's past, it was built in times of extreme conflict, and more of such conflict, not less, will be necessary if our future is to be something other than decline. □

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Paul Berman

WITH THE LOWER DEPTHS

Some Changes in Literary Outlook

In *The Bonfire of the Vanities,* Tom Wolfe devotes a single passage to the way historical memory influences a certain kind of modern liberal sensibility. Wolfe's Bronx assistant district attorney, Kramer, searching his political conscience, stumbles on the word "socialist" in the columns of the *Village Voice* (an enjoyable touch). And this word prompts a private rumination:

> Kramer had no interest in left-wing politics, and neither did his father. Yet in their house, when he was growing up, the word *socialist* had religious overtones. It was like *Zealot* and *Masada*. There was something Jewish about it. No matter how wrongheaded a socialist might be, no matter how cruel and vindictive, he possessed somewhere in his soul a spark of the light of God, of Yahweh.

Socialism leads to a contemplation of unions:

> His father was a would-be capitalist, a servant of capitalists in actual fact, who had never belonged to a labor union in his life and felt infinitely superior to those who did. Yet one night Senator Barry Goldwater had been on TV promoting a right-to-work bill, and his father had started growling and cursing in a way that would have made Joe Hill and the Wobblies look like labor mediators. Yes, the labor movement was truly religious, like Judaism itself. It was one of those things you believed in for all mankind and didn't care about for a second in your own life.

This isn't right. The father of someone like Assistant D.A. Kramer might have prattled on about Masada and God and indulged a religious streak, though probably not in words like these; and elsewhere in his inconsistent mind, he might have preached the evils of capitalism and the destiny of the proletariat. But the sacred and the socialist would probably not have mixed. Socialism among the New York Jews of a generation or two ago was not a liberation theology. It was secular, even antireligious.

Still, leaving aside the confusion over religious terminology, something is correct about Wolfe's picture. Conscience is a historical construction. In identifying the residue that old-fashioned New York socialism has left on someone like the not-too-principled assistant district attorney, in noticing that the mere shadow of a term like socialism arouses a kind of atavistic response in such a person, even if socialism's meaning has by now gotten tangled up in matters so extraneous as to reach all the way to religion—in noticing all this, Wolfe has observed something true and significant about liberal instincts in the present.

What is this half-remembered thing, the socialist shade from the past? Wolfe ascribes Kramer's sentiment to his father, but since even father "had no interest in left-wing politics," a reader might suppose that father's socialism, too, was merely half-remembered and that, in the Kramer family, grandfather, the oppressed immigrant garment worker (taking a wild guess about Kramer family history), was socialism's truest tribune. Grandfather, we might suppose, did find himself now and then at left-wing meetings. Of course *The Bonfire of the Vanities* has no occasion to mention a grandfather and still less what was learned at the meetings. Yet to spell out the original Kramer family socialism is not so very difficult.

Grandfather—let us imagine—upheld essentially three doctrines, beginning with one about

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history. He felt that a more cooperative and egalitarian society than that based on sweatshop exploitation not only could be created but was, in fact, inevitable. His second belief was economic. He supposed that the vast working class was capable of forming its own economic system, that working people, either directly or through their leaders, could assume the management of production and distribution and do it not only more justly but more efficiently.

Finally, he subscribed to a set of moral values and instincts regarding society, a kind of moral sociology. He looked at other working people in all parts of the economy and the world, and his heart beat with sympathy and identification. Maybe his socialism tilted to the radical side. In that case, he looked downward, too, at people who were too oppressed and too wretched to be respectable workers like himself, at beggars and the utterly poor, and to some extent even at the people who had sunk into the bottom criminal class—at prisoners and the pathetic lumpenproletariat who were the bane of his existence. And for these people, too, he felt at least a flickering sympathy. He regarded the rich and powerful, not the very poor, as his enemies. He stood with and not against "the lower depths." The more abject and pathetic and defeated people were, the stronger was grandfather's conviction that socialist ideas of egalitarian cooperation and working-class productivity had a moral and not just historical or economic basis.

Now, grandfather's doctrines on history and economics have not been flatly disproved, and they have certainly not disappeared; but the sharpness of their contours has dropped away. Today no one seriously believes that an altogether new society is close at hand. The whole notion of an impending conflict between capitalism and socialism tends to obscure rather than clarify the actual alternatives in the modern predicament, which lean toward more capitalism or more socialism but not to a decisive historic choice between the two. Today we can imagine a greater concentration of power in the giant multinational corporations—or a greater democratic control over production and markets (instead of the outright nationalized economy dreamed of by state socialists of the past). We can picture a "South Africanization" of the work force based on unskilled labor and strict hierarchy—or a greater economic role for professionalism, pride-in-craft, decentralized management, worker participation, and other measures (instead of the direct seizure of the factories dreamed of by the old-time syndicalists).

We can imagine and even predict that choices like these will become unavoidable in the future, as the economy globalizes and advances, and that concepts of economic organization drawing on socialist inspirations will seem more relevant, not less, in the years to come. Yet socialist ideas in their modern form, lacking something of the old simplicity, do lack some of the old appeal, too. It's harder nowadays, in fact it's impossible, for a quick-witted comrade to stand on a crate with a flag and rouse a crowd of fellow wage-slaves. That may explain why young Kramer takes "no interest" in left-wing politics.

What about grandfather's third doctrine, then, the moral sociology, the sympathy for fellow working people and even for the very poor and the oppressed? Wasn't this the old fundamentalism's most crucial feature of all? Has this idea, too, lost its contours, faded into the past? Does it, too, linger in the consciences of grandsons only as a half-forgotten tug on the conscience—"one of those things you believed in for all mankind and didn't care about for a second in your own life"?

In a polemical essay that Wolfe has published in the brand-new edition of his novel, he takes up one aspect of this question, though by addressing issues that are literary and not socialist. He observes that the grand nineteenth-century novelists seized on the city as their subject, with its themes of rich and poor, extreme individuality, justice and injustice. Yet the life of cities (Wolfe argues) has not appealed to the greatest of the modern novelists, mostly because the elite intelligentsia looks down its nose at popular fictional studies of vast social themes and prefers topics that are more intimate and inaccessible. To the readers of Joyce and Bellow, Wolfe's point may seem hard to credit. Yet, as with his notion of Jewishness and socialism, perhaps something

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about it is not untrue. He quotes Lionel Trilling, who said that the great nineteenth-century novelists wrote studies of character as influenced by social class. In the same vein, it could be said that the great city novelists of the nineteenth century wrote studies of specific grand motives and emotions as influenced by the hubbub of city life. In the case of Dickens and Zola and many a lesser writer, the motives and emotions tended to be sympathy for the downtrodden. And hasn't *this* theme faded from the modern novel?

Wolfe pictures his own novel in the Zola tradition, but if Zola's social sympathies are kept in mind, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* could just as well be taken as an example of that tradition's demise. There's no reason to denigrate Wolfe's gift for satire and caricature. He is a marvelous journalist (and in his essay correctly celebrates journalism, meaning hard research and reporting, as a component of literature). By dint of many a gruesome subway trek to 161st Street, he has drawn an artful cartoon of the courthouse politics and newspaper life of New York, just as his hero Zola, by descending into the coal mines, caught something of the miners' misery (though if we are to bandy about nineteenth-century comparisons, it might be more appropriate to group Wolfe with a melodramatist like Eugene Sue, whose *Mysteries of Paris*, like *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, began as a series in a periodical). But Wolfe is not especially interested in grand emotions or, for that matter, even in character; he's not naturally a novelist. And among the grand emotions that do not especially engage him are, it must be said, the old-fashioned table-pounding sentiments of social sympathy.

Dickens, Sue, and Zola wrote protest novels against the rich. Today we have protest novels against the poor. *The Bonfire of the Vanities* works up a splendid satiric indignation against the parvenus and the people who spend $350,000 on a fireplace—yet its truest rage hammers at the mendacity and violence of the nameless black and Latin immigrant masses, who never appear as anything but an anonymous muttering mob. And to return to the question of socialism and its doctrines, it does seem that the third component of grandfather's left-wing imagination, his sympathy with the downtrodden, has indeed gone the way of socialism's historical and economic ideas—at least among the leading literary and popular writers. The old-fashioned sympathy hasn't disappeared entirely, of course. But it is no longer very sharply defined. It is seen as an idea from the dusty past. An out-of-date notion. Something that is mostly *remembered*, but not exactly experienced in the present.

I realize that readers are already rushing forward to complain that a debonair journalist with conservative instincts like Tom Wolfe can hardly be made to stand for the whole of modern literature; that sympathy for the downtrodden is *not* like the other elements of socialist fundamentalism and has *not* diminished and has, on the contrary, remained entirely accessible to the modern imagination. Perhaps someone will argue that, far from having diminished, sympathy for the downtrodden has grown since the days when grandfather waved his red flag, as shown by the very welfare measures whose incorporation into the modern state has vitiated the old either/or choice between capitalism and socialism. Perhaps someone will mutter that today's poor are not quite up to the higher standards of the poor of yesteryear—that the bottom class of today is morally more wretched, that drugs and crime have given us a depths so low as to lie beyond sympathy. Someone may complain that today's bottom class upholds too many crackpot theories and cheers too many demagogic manipulators.

Still, all you have to do is glance at the writers that Grandfather Kramer, if he was a reading man, would have treasured, from Dickens to Jack London, to notice that a difference in generosity between the past and the present is not imaginary—at least in books. Let me cite, just because the books happen to be on my table, an example that grandfather wouldn't have known (though his Spanish or Cuban immigrant neighbors might): the novelist Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920). Galdós is exactly the kind of writer that Wolfe has in mind when he speaks of the nineteenth-century city realists. As Dickens and Balzac were to London and Paris, Galdós was to Madrid. He wrote about the Spanish royal court, about the

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revolutionary republicans, about the rising middle class (his special subject), and also about the wretched South Madrid slums that were not, judging from his vivid descriptions, any sweeter or safer than our own South Bronx.

He tells us in the introduction to one of his celebrated studies of South Madrid, *Misericordia* ("Mercy" or "Compassion"), that he "proposed to go to the lowest layers of Madrid society, describing and presenting the humblest types, the greatest poverty, the professional begging, the vice-ridden vagrancy, the poverty that is almost always sad, in some cases picturesque or criminal and meriting correction." His book required, as per Wolfe's injunction, months of research. Was researching the slums easier in 1897 than it is today? The difficulties and dangers of penetrating into Madrid's "evil-smelling" southern districts were such that Galdós was obliged to disguise himself as a doctor from Municipal Hygiene. He didn't soften the ghastliness. He went accompanied by police. He didn't ascribe all problems to the enemy class. He knew that South Madrid was unhealthy not just in the sense of physical disease.

Yet the feeling that he worked up in *Misericordia* and in other novels was an immense sympathy for these wretched persons of the Madrid slums. The beggars gather outside the church and wail with pain, the drunks indulge their vice to the point of suicide, the deluded Quixotesque dreamers sink ever deeper into homelessness, every third person seems half out of his mind, and as the pages turn, Galdós's heart pounds harder and harder for these unfortunate people—if perhaps not for every individual. Sympathy and solidarity were, for a writer like him, as much the themes of literature as any other emotion. Compassion was his guitar. It was rich and colorful, now open to satire, now to frank weeping, now to anger. It was, for him, the biggest of all emotions, the great all-inclusive chord. And when you read such a writer, it is hard not to conclude that emotions and themes like his have indeed withdrawn from the center of modern literature. Among the dominant novelists of our own time, how many would even try to write about the people whom Galdós adopted as his protagonists: a beggar in *Misericordia*, a prostitute in *Fortunata and Jacinta*, a stunted victim of industrial pollution in *Marianela*? Of course a variety of works from the present can be named—but not too many of them, and at any rate, they can't claim to speak for our age.

Several reasons can be offered for why such a narrowing of the moral imagination has occurred. For instance, we might cite the kitsch-ification that followed from false leftisms of the past. We might speculate that greater wealth has erected stronger walls around the middle class, such that certain kinds of concerns no longer press upon the ordinary writer or reader (though that seems less and less true). But mostly I wonder if the feeling of compassion and solidarity isn't somehow connected, at a deep level, with the other original elements of the socialist idea—with the expectation of a new stage of history based on a new kind of economy. Maybe the writers of the nineteenth century looked to the downtrodden for themes because they felt that the poor were not, as they have come to seem today, marginal, but were instead the key to the future. Maybe the writers strummed their sympathetic chords because they had a notion of history and economy that directed them to do so. Maybe they felt that compassion and solidarity were linked to the laws of history and were therefore hardheaded and authentic, not softheaded and false.

The fading of left-wing fundamentalism about history and economics is not to be regretted, given that it comes on the heels of social progress and that, besides, certain of the old hopes lent themselves too easily to disastrous uses. But it may be that, without these sturdy old doctrines to prop them up, sympathy and solidarity begin to sag. We may have reached a place where, due to the general rise of productivity and wealth, we are at last materially capable of eliminating the worst sorts of poverty—only to find that we no longer have the will. Grandfather Kramer is no more; today we have the district attorney. We do not have Zola or even Eugene Sue; we have Tom Wolfe. Socialism's meaning is vaguer; our hearts are smaller. □

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Arthur Young

"It's the struggle, my boy—poverty makes young men successful and develops character."
"Of course you are going to insist that your children grow up in poverty?"

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Maxine Phillips

OUR CHILDREN AS VICTIMS

Who among us would insist that our children repeat the miseries—real or imagined—of our childhoods? Why, then, do we tolerate other people's children suffering more than most of us will ever do in a lifetime? The answers lie in a tangle of history, psychology, economics, culture. But the results are plain.

The statistics tell the story:

• The United States ranks behind eight industrialized countries in child poverty rates. One in five American children lives in poverty. (Although the majority of poor children are white, the numbers for nonwhite children are particularly grim. Some 45 percent of black and 39 percent of Hispanic children live below the artificially low official poverty line.) And fewer and fewer of these children are getting help. In 1973 the number of poor children receiving AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) was 83.6 per hundred. By 1987, as the holes in the "safety net" widened, it was down to 59.8 per hundred.

Where did those "savings" go? Well, from 1978 to 1988 the income redistribution from the poor and the middle class to the rich was $61 billion. Meanwhile, the federal share of AFDC payments, which was $8.8 billion in 1987, is less than 1 percent of the annual federal budget.

• Between 1973 and 1987 the median earnings of all young family heads (adjusted for inflation) dropped by 24.1 percent. These were mostly men who lost decent-paying jobs in the industrial sector. As the earnings of young men fell, so did their marriage rates, by one-third. In 1979, full-time, year-round work at a minimum-wage job pulled a family of three out of poverty. A decade later, minimum-wage employment left a family of three about 30 percent below the federal poverty level. As their ability to support even a small family erodes, young men are less likely to marry. Since 1973, out-of-wedlock birth rates have doubled.

Of course, not everyone's wages went down. In 1960 a CEO made forty-one times what a factory worker made. By 1988 the figure was ninety-three times the salary of a factory worker. Although the real after-tax earnings of families in the first three income quintiles has declined since 1977 and the earnings of families in the fourth quintile have grown by less than 1 percent, the real after-tax income of the richest 1 percent of the population has jumped by 110 percent.

• The United States ranks last among nineteen nations in its infant mortality rate, and nonwhite infants are more than twice as likely to die as white ones. This means that a black child born in inner-city Boston has less chance of surviving the first year of life than a child born in Panama, North or South Korea, or Uruguay.

• One in four homeless people in cities is a child. Every night an estimated 100,000 children go to sleep homeless. Federal funding for low-income housing has been slashed by more than 80 percent since 1980.

• From 1980 to 1985 immunization levels for infants and toddlers eroded significantly. The federal government has suspended data collection, but it is estimated that only 50 to 60 percent of two-year-olds in low-income urban neighborhoods are immunized appropriately.

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There have already been several deadly measles epidemics, and public health experts fear an outbreak of polio or pertussis.

- Homicide is the leading cause of injury-related deaths among children younger than one, surpassing motor vehicle accidents.
- About 135,000 children a day bring guns to school.
- Between nine million and twelve million children younger than eighteen have no health insurance.
- The United States, with 7 percent of its infants born at low birthweight (under 5.5 pounds), ranks 29th among 37 countries, behind Spain, France, Hungary, Austria, Canada. Low birthweight babies are twenty times more likely to die and forty times more likely to be disabled than other infants.
- Federal help for elementary and secondary education fell 22 percent from 1979 to 1988.
- Half of American seventeen-year-olds do not have reading, math, and science skills that would allow them to perform moderately complex tasks such as summarizing a newspaper editorial or calculating decimals.
- In the 1988 international assessment of math and science achievement conducted by the Educational Testing Service, American thirteen-year-olds ranked last, behind the United Kingdom, Spain, Ireland, Korea, and three Canadian provinces.
- In 1987 black fifteen- to nineteen-year-old males were ten times more likely to be shot and five times more likely to be killed by other violent means than white males of the same age group.
- Almost two-thirds of all mothers in the work force are raising their children alone or have husbands who earn less than $15,000 per year.
- Each day 501 girls younger than 18 become parents. Most of them are not married.
- Substance abuse by parents is resulting in growing numbers of very young children entering an already overwhelmed child welfare system.
- In 1987 HIV infection was the ninth leading cause of death among one- to four-year olds.
- The yearly cost of eliminating poverty would be about 55 billion dollars. The savings and loan bailout will run anywhere from 160 to 500 billion dollars.

These numbers can and do fill books—briefing books for legislators, policy books for planners, textbooks for students. And the story they tell is of a rich society that has written off a large number of children.

For too many of us, these are OPC—Other People's Children. We're doing all we can to protect our own children from inadequate schooling, violence, the prevalence of drugs, the pain of failed relationships.

We shouldn't have to read a book to know what's in store for a society that tolerates the story these figures tell. At the moment, we don't see much hope for changing the lives of OPCs or the lives of the self-satisfied and self-righteous crooks who have robbed so many of their childhoods.

To bring a child into the world is an act of hope. And the children are very much here—yours, mine, theirs, ours. And just maybe that hope can be justified.

Most of the statistics in this article are taken from two publications of the Children's Defense Fund: *Children 1990: A Report Card, Briefing Book, and Action Primer;* and *S.O.S. America! A Children's Defense Budget.* Children's Defense Fund, 122 C Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001, (202) 628-8787.

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Lenny Glynn

WHO REALLY MADE THE S&L MESS?

"Greatest Financial Scandal in U.S. History"

Some rob you with a six-gun,
some with a fountain pen.
—Woody Guthrie

During the mid-to-late-1980s much of the American Southwest came to resemble the closing scenes of *The Last Picture Show*, with the prairie winds blowing dry leaves and tumbleweeds past the filmtown's dilapidated stores and shuttered movie house. Along a fault line running roughly from Tulsa to Dallas and Houston, the decay spread east, west, and south as far as Louisiana, Arizona, and Colorado. Throughout the region, once-busy oil rigs lay rusting, empty "see-through" office buildings stippled big-city downtowns, tawdry malls and unsold condos flaked and peeled along the interstates and feeder roads. Spawned by the late seventies' oil boom and the speculative frenzies that followed, the derelict structures are the visible legacies of the savings and loan (S&L) "mess." Roughly half the $150 billion plus in failed assets (aka "loans") now in the Resolution Trust Corporation's hands are in Texas and Oklahoma alone.

The most grotesque, still metastasizing financial scandal in American history, the S&L collapse has already busted this year's federal budget, forced George Bush to renege on his fatuous "no-tax" pledge, undermined foreign confidence in U.S. finances, and derailed the careers of the politicians—Jim Wright, Tony Coehlo, the "Keating Five"—so far identified as willing tools of the S&L lobby. There will be plenty more casualties, financial and political. The current recession will be deepened both by higher taxes and the lost liquidity that now-defunct S&Ls provided. The dream of home ownership that the S&Ls were designed to finance may recede beyond the grasp of millions of Americans. The full cost of the S&L "rescue" will likely surge past current estimates of $500 billion or $2,000 per capita. And if the past is prologue, the "rescue" will itself generate "Son of S&L" scandals.

That's because the S&L mess was born under, analyzed by, and is being "solved" through the lenses of a uniquely American optic. Call it "Sunbelt ideology," though it's hardly unique to the region. It is, in fact, the dominant ideology of the Nixon-Carter-Reagan-Bush era. Sunbelt ideology is pseudo–laissez-faire, shamelessly combining a drive to get government "off the backs" of business with a huge appetite for government spending and guarantees—currently, of course, for the S&Ls victim/depositors. It's party-time ideology, bereft of accountability.

In its original manifestation, the Goldwater campaign of 1964, Sunbelt ideology had the virtue of some libertarian consistency. Goldwater bluntly proposed privatizing Social Security and selling off the Tennessee Valley Authority to private business. But in the sixteen years before the ascension of Ronald Reagan, the ideology mutated, dropping its politically suicidal honesty while retaining its deregulatory core. Most farm supports, water projects, loan guarantees, deposit insurance—the bulk of New Deal financial and infrastructure pro-

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grams—would be inviolable; only the regulations meant to monitor them would be scrapped and the regulators degraded. The unspoken aim was a "free market" with risks guaranteed or underwritten by the state.

It's hardly surprising that such a stew simmered best over the ideological campfires of the Southwest and Southern California, the adopted homelands of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. This Wild West of raw "individualism" is not only dominated by vast federal landholdings but historically more dependent on federal spending than any other region. From the Grand Canyon to the sprinkler systems of Beverly Hills and the irrigation ditches of the San Joaquin Valley, a vast hydraulic civilization has been built on taxpayers' money. The allegedly rip-roaring capitalism of the whole region has been underpinned by a multibillion-dollar tide of federal cash for dams, water projects, farm supports, interstates, defense plants, and bases.

The Southwest's resulting love-hate relationship with the federal government has been compounded by the get-rich-quick mentality of resource booms in land, gold, uranium, and, above all, petroleum. Little wonder, then, that when Sunbelt ideology came to power with Reagan's 1980 victory, the removal of all oil and gas price controls, indeed, the dismantling of any serious federal energy policy at all—save for filling the Strategic Oil Reserve—was as high on the new regime's agenda as tax cuts and the defense spending surge. That the United States is paying for the Reagan-Bush decision to "get government off the backs" of the energy industry is painfully obvious as Saddam Hussein squats atop Kuwait. But that Washington has to go hat-in-hand to allies to finance Desert Shield is largely a result of the deregulatory moves that "freed" S&Ls from 1982 to the present from the controls and supervision that had made them secure institutions for half a century.

Origins of the Crisis

To be fair, the Reagan administration did inherit an S&L industry in its first major crisis since 1932. It had begun, subtly, with competition for deposits from high-interest money market funds in the inflationary 1970s. As inflation hit double digits, billions of dollars drained out of S&Ls and commercial banks barred from paying more than 5.25 percent. The result was a slow-motion bank run stanched only when Congress lifted the interest rate ceilings in March, 1980 and raised the levels of federal deposit guarantees to $100,000. That enabled banks and S&Ls to bid against the money funds for depositors and spawned a new "industry" on Wall Street—brokering "hot money"—packaging deposits close to the $100,000 insurance limit into S&Ls desperate for cash flow.

In a more subtle regulatory shift, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in 1980 also deleted a long-standing rule limiting brokered deposits to 5 percent of an S&L's total. By the late 1980s some of the largest, most disastrous failures would strike S&Ls with up to half their deposits in "hot money."

Consider the American Diversified Savings Bank of Lodi, California, one example cited by Martin Mayer in the best book so far on S&Ls, *The Greatest Ever Bank Robbery*. From 1983 to 1988, when it was finally shut down, American Diversified held from $11.7 million to over $1.1 billion in assets, all of them federally insured, $800 million of them worthless loans to be made good by the Feds—"Roughly as much," Mayer notes, "as the Federal government had at risk in the much-debated bail-outs of New York City, Chrysler and Lockheed combined."

Pyramiding on a tiny capital base, American Diversified's growth was almost exclusively fueled by "hot money." At collapse, the bank's average deposit was $80,807. Mayer cites Jonathan Gray, a Wall Street researcher who reported to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation on American Diversified: "[W]ith perhaps $500,000 in equity, it destroyed $800 million in insured deposits, a kill ratio of 1,600 to 1. . . . This anecdote is tantamount to a news report that a drunken driver has wiped out the entire city of Pittsburgh."

But that's hindsight. In 1981, the "Father" of the brokered deposit business, former Merrill Lynch chairman Donald Regan, became Ronald Reagan's secretary of the treasury.

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By then, the first S&L crisis was already well underway, compounded by Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker's 1979 decision to crush inflation by letting interest rates drift to stratospheric levels. The prime rate climbed as high as 20.5 percent by 1981. That plunged the bulk of the S&Ls into a bind: they might be able to attract deposits by paying high interest rates, but the bulk of their outstanding loans was tied up in low-paying mortgages, they still faced mandatory interest-rate "caps" on new mortgages, and they were virtually barred from lending to riskier, more lucrative industries than home buying. Not suprisingly, the net worth of American S&Ls plummeted from $32 billion in 1980 to $3.7 billion by December 1982.

The S&L industry seemed on the verge of extinction; but there were grounds for hope. Volcker's brutal money squeeze had broken the back of inflation. Interest rates were easing, and much of the S&L industry could look forward to a return to health once the rates fell enough to make mortgages profitable again. As L.J. Davis noted in a brilliant *Harper's* article ("Chronicle of a Debacle Foretold," September 1990), all that would have been required was to let the worst S&Ls fail at the cost of a few billion dollars from the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corp. "This would strain the fund," Davis wrote, "a fund, remember, built of moneys from the thrifts themselves—but not destroy it. Were the industry to take its losses now [1982–83], it would cost the taxpayers nothing."

Alas, the S&L lobby in Washington, the U.S. League for Savings Institutions, didn't see it that way, and, in the supercharged laissez-faire ambiance of Reagan's Washington in 1982 it was able to get a series of legislative and regulatory changes that created a disaster our children will be paying for. The League's already legendary clout was greatly enhanced by the bipartisan bidding for business favor—and campaign contributions—that marked the early Reagan years. S&Ls are estimated to have contributed more than $11 million to politicians during the 1980s.

The Reaganauts' disparaging and starving of regulatory bodies went hand-in-glove with the league's efforts. As Stanford Law School's Joseph Grundfest notes, the League was better able to override the public interest than most of the more narrowly based lobbies. The balance of special-interest demands that Congress brokers "is vulnerable to a rogue constituency that has a broad geographic base, pursues a noncontroversial ideology popular with the middle class, actively finances congressional campaigns and is willing to exploit Congress' fiscal blind spots," Grundfest argues.

Cloaked in the mantle of "home ownership," with bases nationwide, the League was able to extract changes that effectively freed S&Ls from the very home-lending mandate that gave them legitimacy. It also pressed for sublte but far-reaching shifts from pliant Reagan-era regulators—then drove truckloads of lucre past Congress's fiscal "blind spots" through rulings so obscure they made even financial journalists yawn.

For its part, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board lowered the reserves that S&Ls were required to hold from 5 percent of outstanding loans to 3 percent, nearly doubling S&Ls' lending power. (Instead of lending $100,000 with $5,000 on reserve, an S&L could now float loans of nearly $170,000 on the same $5,000 safety margin.) A series of arcane accounting changes followed, essentially allowing S&Ls to depict themselves as financially sound while the real value of their balance sheets deteriorated.

The Federal Home Loan Bank Board also opened the once tightly regulated S&L business—formerly dominated by locally based "mutual" associations of depositors—to virtually anyone with the capital to buy or found an S&L. With hundreds of S&Ls still under water financially, that opened the way for cheap takeovers and start-ups by poorly capitalized, even shady "entrepreneurs." The script that cast Jimmy Stewart as a benevolent S&L owner in *It's a Wonderful Life* was being rewritten as film noir.

It was left to Congress, faithfully stenographing the S&L wish list, to complete the rewrite. It's called the 1982 Depository Institutions Act, sponsored by Representative Frederick St. Germain of Rhode Island and Senator Jake Garn of Utah. "Freeing" S&Ls to invest up to 40 percent of their lending in nonresiden-

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tial real estate and 30 percent in high-interest consumer loans, the act relieved S&Ls of the chore of financing home construction and sales. The greener pastures of commercial real estate speculation were now open to them—and they, in turn, were up for grabs by canny developers. With no trace of irony—or any sense of what he was signing—Ronald Reagan called it "the most important legislation for financial institutions in the last fifty years."

All too right! In a competitive bidding war that quickly followed, California, Texas, and Florida soon adopted even more liberal legislation for their state-chartered—but federally insured—S&Ls, allowing them to lend to any venture they wanted, even to take equity stakes. The S&L sheep, in short, were now free to play with the wolves of Sunbelt real estate or to be taken over by those very wolves who could then bid up for vast amounts of "brokered" deposits to loan to each other. This foul mix explains why the vast bulk of S&L losses so far is concentrated in Texas and a few neighboring states that spent the middle 1980s in an insensate burst of real estate speculation.

It should be no surprise that the mix of government deposit guarantees, unlimited access to brokered deposits, freedom to speculate, and demoralized, intimidated regulators would breed scams among the Sunbelt S&Ls. There is, after all, a long tradition of confidence men in both American life and literature and a free-floating population of loan kiters, financial con men, and "boiler-room" land and commodity hustlers separating fools from their money. (See: Florida, History.) These folks were drawn like jackals to the Sunbelt S&Ls in the middle 1980s and doubtless stole far more with their fountain pens than in any pistolero's wildest dream.

The complex daisy chains of property "flipping" practiced by the new breed of "rogue" S&L operator was captured by Curtis J. Lang in the July 10 *Village Voice*:

> In October 1983, one Dallas real estate investor, Louis G. Reese III, bought 2145 acres of cow pasture from a Vancouver S&L called First City Investment, which loaned him $17.25 million, or $8,014.51 per acre. That same day, Reese sold the property to Jerry Parsons, who worked out of Reese's Dallas office. Parsons borrowed the money from State Savings in Lubbock. The price per acre had soared to $11,188.19 and the debt on the cow pasture had now climbed to $24 million.
>
> Three days later, Parsons sold the land to a shell company called 2138 Joint Ventures controlled by himself and Louis Reese, simultaneously using part of the original loan as collateral to get a $5.3 million loan from a Fort Worth bank. Four months later, in March, 1984, Parsons and Reese sold the property to two developers who borrowed money from Sunbelt Savings in Dallas to buy it. A few hours later, the developers sold one-quarter of the land, which was now encumbered with a debt of $44.7 million, at a price of $20,915.77 per acre.
>
> In November 1984, the developers sold the remaining three-quarters of the land back to the Reese Children's Trust No. II. The Reese family used money borrowed from Stockton Savings in Addison, Texas, to buy the land back and then defaulted on the loan, forcing Stockton to foreclose. The price per acre was now $23,995.34. Three weeks later, Reese's Children's Trust sold the foreclosed property to Monticello Investments, a shell company whose president and treasurer was Louis G. Reese III. Three days later, the Reese family paid Stockton $2 million in overdue interest to get a loan extension. That same day, Reese sold the property to five developers, who borrowed more money from Western Savings in Dallas to purchase the property at a price of $41,578.86 per acre—total cost, $65.737 million. Nine months later, Western Savings went broke and the developers filed for bankruptcy. No one had ever put brick to a stick. U.S. taxpayers will have to make up for all the "missing deposits."

Sunbelt Savings, Western Savings, and State Savings have all been named by the *Houston Post* as members of a daisy chain of failed thrifts with links to organized crime and even, perhaps, to the CIA. All three have collapsed, at a cost to taxpayers of over $3 billion. And they were hardly unique. Indeed, popular myth by now ascribes the S&L crisis to outright fraud, embezzlement, and con artistry. That sentiment is being assiduously fostered by Congress and the Bush administration in search of politically juicy scapegoats.

Not surprisingly, their targets vary. Bush, who headed a Reagan administration task force on deregulation, now professes himself

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shocked, frankly, *shocked* by the "S&L crooks" he failed to notice a few years back. Congressional Democrats, up to their eyeballs as a party in the S&L mess, prefer to keep the spotlight on the President's son Neil Bush, the "poster boy of the S&L crisis." Neil Bush was a tender thirty years of age when named director of a Denver S&L called Silverado—local nickname: Desperado—later shut down at a cost to taxpayers of over $1 billion. Like many spawn of the Sunbelt's salad days, Silverado managed before collapsing to breakfast on the new morning in America—swelling from under a hundred million dollars in loan assets in 1980 to billions of dollars by the time federal regulators were given a green light to stop the hemorrhaging. That permission came, conveniently, just weeks after Dad George secured his 1988 election victory. Son Neil has been accused of conflicts of interest for his role in recommending loans from Silverado to some of his own, generous business partners. This bears watching.

However sleazy the Reagan-era S&L industry became, fraud per se explains only a fraction of the losses—perhaps a mere $10–$20 billion. The exuberant greed so often featured in the winning of the West—combined with the rank stupidity of S&L managers weaned in a protective regulatory atmosphere—accounts for the bulk of the losses. The region was simply swept up in a speculative bubble in which greedy developers and dumb bankers reinforced each others' propensity to gamble. The psychology worked like this: bankers would lend to dubious projects because developers had had successful track records, while developers would take the bank's confidence in them as a sign that their intuitions were valid. Together with the incentive structures that newly lax S&L regulations set up, the combination was highly combustible.

Bankers began earning more money on "origination" fees for loans than on the loans themselves, while developers were often able to sell projects to other speculators for a heady profit. It was a classic Ponzi scheme in which the latest investors were paid off by new incoming funds, fresh "hot money" deposits fueling new waves of speculation. For real estate brokers and investors, construction firms, lawyers, auditors, title companies, surveyors, and so on, it was in those days heaven to be alive. Brokers raked in commissions, auditors inflated values, bankers booked "origination" fees, lawyers battened on fighting off regulators, regulators sometimes sold out for plush jobs at the S&Ls, journalists largely missed the story, and some toadying economists blessed the new S&L "entrepreneurs" as a godsend.

Alan Greenspan, now chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, was one of those who testified before Congress on behalf of Charles Keating, the egregious owner of Lincoln Savings in California. Keating paid himself and close relatives about $34 million in salaries for running up losses of $2.5 billion. Of seventeen S&Ls Greenspan cited in his testimony, sixteen have failed. With blue-chip opinions blatantly up for sale, half a dozen professions prostituted themselves. The worst outrage in the S&L mess, Mayer writes, "is not the hundreds of billions of dollars, but the demonstration of how low our standards for professional performance have fallen in law, accounting, appraising, banking and politics."

Still, it was a hell of a party. When the music stopped in 1986–87 and land values began plunging fast, only the very last speculators and the S&Ls that lent to them were hurt—Uncle Sam was left standing, guaranteeing all those deposits.

The S&L mess, then, wasn't mainly fraud, just a magic-realistic collective delusion played out by Babbitts in cowboy boots. Sunbelt banking was a weird, weird scene. Too bad if we couldn't be there for the fun, but we're all in on the action now.

Regional Favoritism

Professor Edward W. Hill of Cleveland State University was the first to tote up the interregional resource transfers the 1989 S&L rescue will demand. By his conservative calculation of $150 billion for the initial bailout—not counting interests costs that will triple the bill by 2020—thirteen states, mostly in the South and Southwest, will be "net

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winners" as depositors are made whole, while thirty-seven other states "lose" on balance, despite having some failed thrifts. Residents of one of George Bush's home states, Connecticut, will "lose" $882 per capita; those of his other home state, Texas, will "win" $3,510 per man, woman, child. Count interest payments and those sums will roughly triple. Hill calls it "the largest Corporate Welfare program since the Great Depression. Individual and corporate taxpayers in 37 states and the District of Columbia will be shipping vast sums of money to 13 states over the next 30 years."

That argument is already causing fissures among regions as the full cost of the S&L crisis bites. "We're looking at resources we desperately need," said Ohio Governor Richard Celeste last summer, "and see them being dished out to deal with this problem—with no real sense that we have a tourniquet to stop the hemorrhaging. Part of this is regional sentiment, but there's a real sense that Head Start and other programs for children and the poor will pay for this."

Of course they will. Yet Hill's seductive thesis is badly flawed. For starters, the insurance is being paid legally. It couldn't be revoked without expropriating depositors' funds, wrecking the government's credit globally, and triggering massive runs on remaining S&Ls and banks. And if nationally financed deposit insurance is, indeed, reimbursing depositors in Sunbelt S&Ls, those depositors don't necessarily live in the Sunbelt, nor are they likely to re-invest there soon.

Instead, thanks to the vast flows of "brokered" money, S&L depositors in, say, Lubbock, Texas, may hail from Boston, Chicago, Osaka, or Medellin. Making good their deposits promises small comfort for Texans who've lived through boom, bust, layoffs, foreclosures, and the collapse of home values. A more relevant point is that the "distressed" office buildings, malls, and condos the feds are now trying to sell in the "winning" Sunbelt states will serve for years to come as lures for companies in other regions to relocate in what amounts to financial free-fire zones. And because taxpayers as a class are far poorer than savers as a class—especially savers who telex wads of $100,000 to desperate S&Ls—the bailout will effect a classically Reaganite "trickle-up" of wealth from poor to rich.

So may the selloff of S&Ls and their assets, if the government persists in rushing what ought to be a slow, deliberate process. Haste in vending off a posse of Texas S&Ls in late 1986—the so-called Southwest Plan—led to poorly structured deals that promise a virtually risk-free windfall for investors like Revlon chairman Ronald Perelman. Perelman picked up five dead Texas S&Ls for $161 million in cash while receiving $1.2 billion in tax benefits and dumping the riskiest assets onto the government's balance sheet.

That package of deals was rushed through by the incompetent Danny Wall, Reagan's head of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB), which was due to be replaced in 1989 by the Resolution Trust Corporation. The cost of the "Southwest Plan" fire sale has since soared from Wall's estimate of $39 billion in taxpayer losses to over $90 billion. Made as the FHLBB was running out of both time and money, these eleventh-hour deals are a paradigm of what the government should not do as it unloads its massive S&L portfolio.

"When you have an imposed deadline, no cash, and doubtful credit, you are going to pay through the nose," says William Seidman, head of the Resolution Trust. "The real question is whether they should have undertaken the transactions at all." The real answer is no. As William Greider, author of *The Secrets of the Temple*, argues, "The greatest hypocrisy of the era is that despite its laissez-faire pretensions, the Federal government is now more deeply engaged in the affairs of private finance—both as owner and manager and as generous beneficiary—than at any other time in the nation's history . . . they are buying and selling and subsidizing—and virtually giving away—financial assets and property on a scale that would have made New Dealers tremble."

It's time, in short, to drop the "free market" cant, admit that we've nationalized a vast chunk of our banking and real estate system, and control its reprivatization over many years. The aim would be to capture for the public the very capital gains that motivate speculators to buy what the government now plans to dump

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fast and cheap. Selling the assets we've bought collectively to private speculators now promises a final "trickle up" windfall.

We've already paid enough as a nation for this debacle—in global standing as well as in cash. Foreigners are amazed that waste on this scale could be allowed to occur. The S&L mess is fueling a general crisis of confidence in U.S. financial management. The dollar's 1980s peak, in fact, came with a March-April 1985 run on Ohio and Maryland S&Ls, not the famous Plaza Accord to lower the greenback in September.

That 1985 warning shot was only a foretaste for foreigners of the bizarre budget wrangles that paralyzed the government last fall when the cost of the S&L rescue busted the budget. It's difficult to exaggerate the sense of incompetence and decay that the government's near paralysis caused abroad. One measure is that the dollar, once a "safe haven," continued to slump through most of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis.

With the former Evil Empire and its satellites imploding economically at year-end 1990, the United States looks increasingly like a marginal player in resolving the cold war it paid so dearly to "win." Nervous foreigners view the S&Ls as harbingers of disasters that could come in commercial banking, insurance, and other financial industries operating under the umbrella of government guarantees. Outside the banking sector, where it guarantees $2 trillion in commercial bank deposits, the government has underwritten at least $750 billion in other loans to farmers, homeowners, students, and so on. Given its S&L record, these are some very large beads to worry with.

Indeed, this year, foreign investors have begun a massive capital flight from the United States, selling billions of dollars in stocks and bonds and sharply curbing direct investment. The result will be slower recovery from recession and less room for the Fed to ease credit without triggering a full-scale collapse of the dollar.

It's probably too much to expect that Congress will effectively grapple with the corrupt campaign financing that lies at the root of the S&L disaster. It's far easier to pontificate about S&L "crooks" than to admit that it was the whole degrading system of fund raising that had a Republican administration wooing S&L contributors with lax regulations while Democratic lawmakers awash in S&L dough lobbied and intimidated the few regulators who tried to slow the rot.

A far simpler measure might be for Congress and the administration to craft legislation mandating accurate accounting—that is, market-based pricing of the risks the feds routinely assume in loan guarantees and other programs hidden off the books. Right accounting might be easier to get through Congress and the regulatory bodies than any package of campaign reform. Forcing the hidden costs of loan insurance and guarantee programs out into the open, argues Grundfest, would have an immediate budget impact. These seemingly "costless" financial time bombs would then have to compete—up front—with Defense, Head Start, and so on rather than festering for years before erupting. "Budget-based, mark-to-market accounting," he warns, "is not an iron-clad guarantee against a recurrence of an S&L-type failure. It is, however, a necessary and feasible first step toward restoring integrity to the political and financial process."

It may also be the quickest way to detect where in the morass of federal obligations the next disaster is incubating. There really is no time to waste. For the $5 trillion U.S. economy, the S&L mess is a painful if affordable farce. Given the shaky state of the nation's finances, the next "discontinuity" could be a tragedy. □

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William Kornblum

WHO IS THE UNDERCLASS?

Contrasting Approaches, a Grave Problem

We hate oppression but
we fear the oppressed.
—V.S. Naipaul

The possible arrival of a new social class evokes grand blasts of imagery. Across history's bookish stage roll bourgeois Christian soldiers, boxcars of workers (trailing haunting specters), limos carrying commissars of the *nomenklatura,* electricians in white coats (breathing soul into new computers). On they parade until, at what we thought must be the end of the social-class spectacle, there appears the latest entry: a ragged urban underclass.

For the class parade to be a full success it seems there must be one class that highlights in its evil all the virtues of the others. The proletariat no longer provokes fear and reaction? Then send up a fearsome underclass. What could be more frightening to the precariously comfortable than drug-crazed, poverty-incensed hordes, led by Willie Horton and Central Park Wilders, legions of dark people with strong backs and weak intellects, who, it is said, do not want to work in "available jobs." The underclass is also said to be breeding generations of feral children. If they reach adulthood, their underclass culture will make them unsuitable for whatever jobs will be available in these waning years of "The American Century."

George Orwell would have recognized this as old-fashioned "fear of the mob" and as weak excuses of the rich for their own excesses. In 1988, however—in our era of trickle down and gush up—George Bush hit on underclass imagery (with its implicit appeal to bigotry) for campaign paydirt. Attention is easily shifted to the moral qualities of the poor and away from those responsible for much of the neglect we see around us. Social scientists (myself included) and journalists write reams about the underclass while the psychology and sociology of savings and loan supercrook Charles Keating and other buccaneers go relatively unexamined.

But, real or not, the idea of the underclass cannot be wished away. There are too many issues in the underclass debate that have immediate bearing on the crisis of our cities. As with all stereotypes there are elements of truth in the imagery. The risks of criminal victimization by people who resemble underclass types are increasing for those who live in the big cities. The rise of homelessness and AIDS, the despair of crack and heroin, the proclaimed (but not factual) failure of public institutions (education, housing, criminal justice, public health): all these are demoralizing and cause people to wonder if the segregated poor have become redundant. Even worse is the claim that the very institutions of the welfare state have failed and in fact have helped to create this new underclass. A convenient charge, this one, for it serves to excuse the nation's ever greater neglect of its have-nots.

I write at a moment of despair over the fate of urban America and New York City in particular. Brutal violence and random slay-

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ings, mayhem in public parks and commercial neighborhoods, roving "posses" of violent, alienated teenagers, all seem to be symptoms of an ever more dangerous underclass. But the facts revealed in the aftermath of the violence frequently contradict our assumptions. The murderers or rapists often turn out to come from relatively stable families and to have jobs and educational aspirations. I think the evidence of declining respect for human life and our failure as a society to inspire our young people are urgent problems. But they are not a unique feature of the poor or down-and-out.

To understand why the idea of the underclass is of limited value we need to separate the arguments over definition from those concerning facts. We need, above all, to locate discussions of the underclass within a broader understanding of continuities and discontinuities in poverty. It may be that permanent poverty is to be a lasting feature of the postindustrial society. As Katherine Newman points out in *Falling From Grace,* downward mobility is threatening to become as much a part of the late twentieth-century American experience as success and affluence. But the idea of the underclass inevitably, and I think wrongly, raises the question of whether the people most in need are redeemable or worthy of redemption. Who, then, are these so-called underclass people?

The Underclass and the Merely Impoverished

All writers on the underclass agree that no matter how defined, its numbers are smaller than those of the poor. The most often used "official" U.S. government definition of poverty nets about thirty-two million Americans (13.1 percent of the population) who live below the threshold annual income of about $12,500 for a family of four. But included among these 32 million (and among the millions of others whose incomes hover just above this low figure) are Native Americans on impoverished reservations; people in households where there is a full-time (low) wage earner, where the household is composed of graduate students, where the household is composed of elderly persons on fixed incomes; and many others. So mere poverty, no matter how calculated, may be a necessary qualification but is not a sufficient measure of what the underclass might be.

The leading cause of poverty in the United States is low wages. Throughout the entire decade of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s (despite the rather paltry 1990 increase in the minimum wage), a family of four with one full-time wage worker earning at or slightly above the minimum wage did not come even close to bringing home enough to exceed the official poverty threshold. Among the fifty million two-parent families in which one or more parents works full time, there are about three million families below the official poverty threshold. Much is written about the dramatic rise in poverty among single-parent families, and the large majority of children in single-parent families are living in poverty; but there are still far more children growing up in two-parent families and many of these are quite poor. In his book *Poor Support,* an invaluable study of contemporary poverty, David Ellwood shows that at least half the children in poverty in the United States are living in two-parent homes suffering the hardships of low wages and lack of employment. And an additional heavy proportion of the children growing up in single-parent homes once lived in two-parent homes that disintegrated because of severe economic hardship.

Separate the working poor, the unemployed, and the handicapped from the underclass, and what remains are people whose behavior, rather than unemployment or low wages, seems to some observers to be the cause of their woes. In *Science* (April 27, 1990), the nation's most prestigious scientific journal, economists Ronald Mincy, Isabel Sawhill, and Douglas Wolf point out that if one subtracts only those among the impoverished in America who have been down for a long count—eight years or more—"then about one fifth of the poor or about 6 million people could be considered members of the underclass." And if one considers the underclass as only those who have been impoverished over their entire lifetimes, the total would be perhaps no more than one or two million (their "educated guess"). But these authors go further and

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choose, as many who write on this subject do, to define the underclass in "behavioral terms." This "behavioral underclass" could be measured, they assert, by counting "the number of people who engage in bad behavior or a set of bad behaviors." Crime (especially in the drug industry), failure to work when not physically or mentally handicapped, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, and long-term welfare recipiency, are the actual bad behaviors they cite, arguing that these are typical of people who do not conform to norms of work, family, and morality. Using a methodology developed by Erol Ricketts and Isabel Sawhill, which counts the population in neighborhoods predominantly composed of people with such "bad behaviors," the authors come up with an estimate of a "behavioral underclass" composed of about 2.5 million people (based on the 1980 census) who live in 880 neighborhoods in American cities where there are high concentrations of other such ill-behaved people.

William J. Wilson's Postindustrial Chicago Underclass

These behavioral definitions of the underclass do not please University of Chicago sociologist William J. Wilson. The most influential writer on persistent poverty and the ghetto poor in the United States (and a dedicated social democrat), Wilson defines the underclass somewhat more broadly as "that heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals who are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system." Wilson's definition includes people who lack training and skills and are thus out of the labor force or at best experiencing long periods of unemployment, individuals engaged in "street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency." These are the populations Wilson refers to when he speaks of the underclass, a term he uses to "depict a reality not captured in the more standard designation, lower class." Although his conception of the underclass clearly has much in common with the behavioral measures of the economists, it encompasses a larger population of people who are excluded from the legitimate occupational world and whose behavior in response to that exclusion may further remove them from legitimate economic competition.

Wilson writes mainly about "the ghetto underclass," which he sees as a new phenomenon. His arguments are presented in his book *The Truly Disadvantaged* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), but his more recent data and analysis of the underclass in Chicago appear in a special issue of the *Annals* (American Academy of Political and Social Science, January 1989). This issue contains a number of important empirical articles by Wilson and his students and colleagues that further develop the theme of social isolation in the "ghetto underclass," especially in Chicago, where their door-to-door research is conducted. This social-isolation thesis has also influenced the work of many other authors, including those who wrote the *Science* article.

Wilson and his coworkers in Chicago strive mightily to avoid the pitfalls of labeling (terms like "bad behaviors") and also seek to avoid having their research appear to blame the victims of poverty for evolving a self-fulfilling "culture of poverty." On the contrary, for Wilson and his student Loïc Wacquant (in the *Annals* article), the central theme

> is that the interrelated set of phenomena captured by the term "underclass" is primarily social-structural and that the ghetto is experiencing a "crisis": not because a "welfare ethos" has mysteriously taken over its residents but because joblessness and economic exclusion, having reached dramatic proportions, have triggered a process of hyperghettoization.

The terribly depressed Chicago ghetto is their primary example. The authors describe a racially segregated population on Chicago's South and West sides where between 1970 and 1980 the proportion of African Americans living in "extreme poverty areas" (neighborhoods where 40 percent or more live in "official poverty") increased from 24 percent to 47 percent and continued to rise during the 1980s. Over the same period in the ten largest U.S. cities, the proportion of poor blacks living in such highly concentrated poverty neighborhoods increased from 22 percent to 38 percent. Wilson could have extended this observation to

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scores of smaller cities such as Newark, Gary, Camden, and Bessemer, Alabama (once a thriving and largely black industrial satellite of Birmingham, now a dusty slum).

In Chicago, as in other large cities, the exodus of jobs and stable families with steady work has amounted to a social hemorrhage. Today's ghetto residents, Wacquant and Wilson argue, "face a closed opportunity structure." They are increasingly closed off from the opportunities afforded others in the society by the "rapid deterioration of housing, schools, businesses, recreational facilities, and other community organizations"—a deterioration greatly aided by government policies of industrial and urban laissez-faire that have channeled a disproportionate share of federal, state, and municipal resources to the more affluent."

Jobs for people in Chicago's black metropolis were always more difficult to obtain than for others in the city, but Wilson and Wacquant show that deindustrialization of the city has hit ghetto residents particularly hard. From 1950 to 1980 the overall proportion of adults (including people over sixty-five) of all races not employed in the city remained rather steady, around 43 percent. For ghetto blacks entering Chicago smokestack industries in the 1950s, the proportions outside the labor force were only slightly higher than for the city overall. By 1970 rates of nonparticipation for ghetto residents were ten to fifteen percentage points higher, and by 1980 anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of ghetto adults were not in the labor force. As a further measure of how far the American Dream is slipping away from the inner-city black poor, Wilson's research shows that in the extreme poverty neighborhoods of Chicago's ghetto, over half (51 percent) of all residents live in households where the annual income is less than $7,500. Three-quarters had "none of six assets" (personal checking account, savings account, IRA, pension plan, money in stocks or bonds, prepaid burial), and 97 percent owned no home, no business, no land.

Some of Wilson's critics, especially conservatives like Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, think blacks themselves are more to blame for their hardship than Wilson does. They counter his "structural" arguments by noting that despite years of economic growth in the 1980s, when millions of jobs were added to the economy, ghetto blacks, and especially males, did not seem to benefit proportionately. Blacks are too quick, the conservative argument essentially states, to accept opportunities in the illegal economy, or too lazy or proud to accept unskilled work, and prefer to sponge off others (for example, AFDC women from the government, black men from AFDC women). They are, from this vantage point, the ill-behaved bulwark of the ghetto underclass. Lest the onus fall on ghetto blacks alone, there are the equally important examples of the Puerto Ricans and Native Americans, whose fate is especially like African Americans. But it is just these examples that help give the lie to the conservatives' blame-the-black-victim arguments.

The Strategic Example of the Puerto Ricans

In the twenty-five years between 1959 and 1984 no minority group in the United States fared worse economically than the Puerto Ricans. Native Americans experienced dramatic declines in their high rates of poverty during the 1970s but still ended the eighties with the highest rates (about 41 percent) of any minority. But Puerto Rican mean family income (measured in constant dollars) decreased by 25 percent over the period, more than double the rate of decline among blacks. In their research on U.S. Hispanics and poverty, Marta Tienda and her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin show that rates of increase in female-headed families and drastic declines in Puerto Rican men's and women's access to decent jobs account for much of this loss. Single-parent (largely female-headed) families increased among Puerto Ricans from 10 percent in 1959 to 35 percent in 1984. The bulk of this decline came, Tienda shows, after 1979, when wealth and opportunity were supposedly beginning to "trickle down."

Declining fortunes in Puerto Rican and black ghettos lend particular support to Wilson's

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"structural" arguments. The shared experience at the bottom of the American working class for Puerto Ricans and African Americans begins during the (relatively) booming 1950s, in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and other metropolitan centers and their industrial satellites (like Newark and Camden and more obscure places like Brightwaters in New York's Suffolk County). Blacks and Puerto Ricans have their own versions of colonial domination to surmount, but in their early experience with industrialization each group did rather well—not, of course, without great hardship. In the 1970s and more precipitously and cruelly in the 1980s, the industrial opportunity ladder for Puerto Ricans had its legs snapped. Call it deindustrialization, restructuring, the Great U Turn, or whatever you want, the result was disaster for brown people on the social-mobility queue in urban and industrial America. To make matters far worse, the Reagan years brought drastic cuts in public-sector employment, cuts in hospital work, cuts in the social safety net, cuts in the quality of education. Like the African Americans, many Puerto Rican ghetto men are demoralized and marked for early graves. Puerto Rican women are left with children and declining employment opportunities. The Puerto Rican experience helps to demonstrate once again that what matters is where you lived and where you had previously hoped to work, as well as the economic and social capital of your parents, not the culture or the particular colonial history of your people.

Demographer John D. Kasarda notes that from 1975 to 1985, "more than 2.1 million nonadministrative jobs were added in eating and drinking establishments, which exceeds the total number of production jobs that existed in 1985 in America's automobile, primary metals, and textile industries combined." And almost all the net gains in jobs with low educational entry requirements have been on the edges of the metropolitan areas, "far removed from large concentrations of poorly educated minorities." Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the rustbelt cities are particularly hard hit by these changes, but innumerable studies around the nation show that there has been a dramatic increase in temporary, part-time, and casual labor and even, in the farming states, a renewed increase in tenant farming as a means of escaping unionized farm labor. Runaway shops, tenant taxis (leased) in the cities, and sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the countryside are evidence of the real meaning of trickle-down economics and the vicious assault upon unions.

A Mirror for the Middle Class

Wilson, Tienda, Mincy, and others serve us well by documenting trends in American poverty, but there remains the problem of separating the poor from those who continue to be lumped in the underclass. In this we are helped by the clear-headed analysis of Christopher Jencks.

In recent articles Jencks traces the ambiguity surrounding the term "underclass" to Ken Auletta's 1982 book of that title. While surely not the first to describe an underclass, Auletta is "largely responsible for making it part of middle-class America's working vocabulary." Auletta included in that description chronically jobless men, long-term welfare mothers, alcoholics, drug dealers, street criminals, deinstitutionalized mental patients, "and all the other walking-wounded who crowded New York City's sidewalks in the later 1970's." The term was convenient for a journalist, Jencks believes, because it "focuses attention on the basement of the American social system (those who are 'under' the rest of us), without specifying what the inhabitants of this dark region have in common." But once the idea of the underclass took hold among journalists and policymakers, they in turn demanded of social scientists the usual studies of definition, size, and trends. In time-honored fashion we social scientists came up with at least twelve ways of defining the supposedly new class, including some of those described in this essay.

To clear things up somewhat, Jencks compares definitions of the underclass to those of the "middle class." The term "middle class," he notes, has a number of meanings in the United States, each of which "implies a mirror-image for the term underclass."

As Americans often define the middle class in terms of relatively stable white- and

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blue-collar occupations, then there may be an "economic underclass" composed of "working-age men and women who cannot get or cannot keep a steady job." But we frequently think of the middle class as those whose behavior affirms such norms as respect for the law, marriage before parenthood, moderation, and so on. If one defines the middle class this way, then perhaps there is a "moral underclass" of those without economic means (to eliminate the Mick Jaggers, Charles Keatings and Ivan Boeskys) who regard these moral tenets "as impractical or irrelevant." Sometimes, however, we think of the middle class in cultural terms, as people who are educated and have social and cultural skills, people who "talk, think, and act like professional and managerial workers" regardless of whether they actually have such jobs. We may also think of the working class as "composed of people who talk, think and act like blue collar workers." Below both the cultural middle class and the blue-collar class there may be an "educational underclass" of people "who lack the information and skills they would need to pass as members" of either class.

Only a social scientist could claim to clarify a debate by replacing one term with three. Jencks points out that a problem with the underclass concept is that it always requires adjectival acrobatics, as we have already seen with Wilson's use of the term "ghetto underclass" and the Mincy-Sawhill notion of a "behavioral underclass." But to postulate the economic underclass, the moral underclass, and the educational underclass helps define whom we are talking about and permits some measurement of possible growth in recent decades.

It will be no surprise that the data Jencks reviews on work and idleness demonstrate real growth in the "economic underclass." The percentage of joblessness among men aged 25 to 54 between 1954 and 1988, for example has crept upward since the 1950s. Joblessness reached a peak about 1984 but still has not declined to levels that were usual in the previous decades. And as always in this century, black joblessness was twice that of whites. Part-time work, casual labor, and long stints of unemployment are routine for youthful workers and those with lower levels of education. Wages also have eroded significantly among hourly workers and those with lower levels of education. Census data that Jencks summarizes show that in constant dollars income between 1967 and 1988 declined by 29 percent for working men with eighth-grade educations or less, by 23 percent among men with some high school, by 10 percent among men with high school diplomas, and by about 4 percent among men with some college. Income rose over the period only for men with college educations.

It may surprise many, however, that Jencks finds no evidence of growth in a moral underclass or in an educational underclass. Ask a sample of taxi drivers or sociology students what has happened in the past decade to crime rates, Jencks suggests, and they will be almost unanimous in asserting that crime has skyrocketed. But they will be wrong. In comparison with the high rates sustained in the 1960s and early 1970s, murder rates are down, as are other victimization rates (although they have increased in some inner city areas—for instance, the New York City Police Department reports that murders and robberies, many associated with the vicious crack epidemic, in the city rose sharply, to near-record levels, during the first six months of 1990). Aggravated assault with injuries (often associated with muggings) declined among whites from 310 per every 10,000 Americans in 1960 to 270 in 1986. Among blacks the decline was from 550 in 1965 to 420 in 1986. These rates are unconscionably high, but offer little evidence for a growing criminal underclass among blacks or whites.

Middle-class Americans often cite the growth in teenage pregnancy and illegitimacy as indicators of the growth of a moral underclass, but here too Jencks finds little support in the data. Between 1960 and 1986 expected births to teenage females actually declined by 50 percent among whites and by almost that much among blacks. Illegitimacy, however, has increased dramatically in the same period, so that about 16 percent of white babies and about

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60 percent of black babies will be born to unmarried women. Much of the precipitous increase in illegitimacy among blacks can be attributed to joblessness among men. There is even evidence among whites and blacks with jobs and income of an increase in male unwillingness to take on family responsibilities; but, as Jencks also notes, "as women earn more they become less willing to marry and more willing to divorce men who are hard to live with." In any event, because illegitimacy is increasing among middle-class people as well as among the poor, it is difficult to make the case that the increasing prevalence of illegitimacy is evidence of growth in a moral underclass.

In education, finally, trends in school achievement offer little support for the idea that there is a growing educational underclass, especially among African Americans. In 1960 almost 44 percent of whites and 76 percent of blacks between 25 and 27 years of age had not finished high school. By 1985 the proportions had declined to 13 percent for whites and 17 percent for blacks, and in fact white graduation rates have leveled off since the mid-1970s while black graduation rates continue to improve steadily. The same trends apply to college completion. In 1960 only 8.2 percent of whites and 2.8 percent of blacks (aged 25 to 29) had completed college. By 1985 the proportions were 23.2 percent for whites and 16.7 for blacks. Considering their extremely low "cultural capital" at the start of desegregation (as economists like to say), blacks made extraordinary gains in this period, and their rate of gain is now faster than that of whites.

These figures do not lend support to the idea of an educational underclass (especially not a black one), but neither are they cause for celebration. If rates of college completion have been increasing (only slowly, if at all, for whites), we still have far to go before we will be educating enough young people with the technical and cultural capabilities required in a rapidly altering economy.

So Jencks finds that only the economic underclass is growing and that "the term underclass, like the term middle class, " lumps together so many different populations that social scientists must use it with extreme care. "They should probably avoid the word altogether unless they are prepared to make clear which of its many meanings they have in mind." Still, he admits, the idea will continue to hold great appeal outside academic circles,

AIDS: COMMUNITY OF THE DAMNED

Victor Ayala directs the SEEK program in one of New York City's community colleges. A native New Yorker of Puerto Rican heritage, Victor himself "came up" through the City University system and knows hundreds of ways to help children of the inner city to a more solid educational footing. The work is exhausting. Budget cuts, tired staff, kids frustrated with school and expecting the worst from the bureaucracies; but Victor dwells on the successes, and this gives him energy to do his night work.

For the past two years Victor has worked four nights a week in the AIDS unit of a large public hospital in Brooklyn. He counsels homeless and indigent AIDS patients. His vast knowledge of the bureaucracies can help ease their anguish. In doing this work day after day Victor has become an expert on how this epidemic is experienced in the bottom depths of the city's poorest neighborhoods and in its embattled public hospital wards.

AIDS is rapidly becoming the scourge of the down and out. Its incidence is highest among intravenous drug users and their lovers and among the regulars in the crack dens, where young women, "crack bitches," often trade sexual favors for the drug. Many of the babies born into this community of the damned will also develop AIDS symptoms.

Victor does this work because he believes more people need to know what occurs inside the changing AIDS epidemic. Often the first, the last, and the most persistent hospital worker to speak with the AIDS patients, Victor writes copious notes on each case. Here is a sample, a

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and "If the term underclass helps put the problems of America's have-nots back on the political agenda, it will have served an extraordinarily useful purpose." This is a sentiment almost everyone can share, but it still leaves some confusion. The underclass is either a political slogan that may be shaped to the advantage of the all-inclusive have-nots of society, or, more accurately from the Jencks analysis, it is a poor surrogate for the lowest, most insecure ranks of the working class.

Falling into the Underclass

Men who unload trucks for daily cash and other casual laborers and those who still seek to become part of the more stable working class (the Jencks "economic underclass") ought not be included, I believe, in a general definition of the underclass. If we must speak of an underclass I hope the term may be narrowed to include only people who barely survive below the legitimate class system of capitalist society and below the lowest ranks of the criminal-class system as well. Most writers agree that the term will be with us despite its difficulties, although Wilson has recently decided to abandon the term as a description of the isolated ghetto poor. He believes, as I and many others do, that the term risks the negative effects of "blaming the victims." If it must be used at all, I think the term underclass ought to refer to people who have fallen or been pushed into a world of suffering they can escape only *with help from others* in the larger society. We can reasonably use the concept of the underclass, for example, to understand such familiar scenes as this:

It is about midnight, on a wintry early spring night, quite near the beginning of the twenty-first century. A line of sedans and taxis, here and there a stretch limo, inches across Manhattan from the Midtown Tunnel toward the Lincoln Tunnel on the West Side. I am in the fitful procession on my way to a college lecture scheduled for early the next day. Once past Fifth Avenue and into the garment center, the cars stopped at red lights are approached by gaunt men holding cans of window spray. They do not wait to see if the drivers want their windshields cleaned but immediately begin their sullen work. Some drivers wave them away, others are more offended. Shouts and insults fly. I take either the more socially conscious or cowardly path (depending on your politics) and spend a few quarters to have my window washed over and over again.

typical vignette among the hundreds he has collected:

> "Dolores" is a 43-year-old black female diagnosed HIV positive, with PCP pneumonia, tuberculosis, and high fevers. She has been homeless for four years and has lived in women's shelters or on the streets, occasionally with friends. She has a twenty-year history of substance abuse, including alcohol, heroin, and crack.
>
> After a month of avoiding me, Dolores finally speaks about her family. She has four children ages eight, ten, fifteen, and eighteen. Two of them live with her aunt. The oldest is in prison for attempted murder. By her standards she has been a neglectful mother. Her past eighteen years are a blur of drug abuse, prostitution, petty robbery, and homelessness. Almost everyone in Dolores's immediate family circle is involved with drugs. An intravenous drug-addicted brother, who frequently shared needles with her sister, died from AIDS-related illnesses. Dolores used to share needles with her sister, too. She has learned recently that her former husband, absent for five years, has died from AIDS-related illnesses.

When Dolores feels some strength she likes to socialize with other AIDS patients and with the hospital staff. The patients share cigarettes and often find ways to secure drugs. Victor finds Dolores an SRO (single-room occupancy) room and she prepares to leave the hospital. Shortly before her discharge the fever returns. A spinal tap reveals that she has cyptococcis meningitis, often a terminal illness in the AIDS patient. Victor describes how Dolores seeks more street drugs in the last two weeks of her life while she denies her impending death. Victor concludes on this note:

> Although Dolores is surrounded by other AIDS patients in various stages of dying, she believes there is time to live before she goes through the same things. As the end approaches, people avoid her room. Her doors remain closed, lights turned off, less and less routine care is provided. □

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Three times in three blocks I put coins in a man's hand. Each time I touch well-calloused fingers or a work-hardened palm.

The windshield washers are not the street urchins who ply this annoying trade uptown. They are adults who haunt the streets of midtown below the bus terminal. In cold weather they sleep in packing crates and cardboard boxes. By day they may seek casual labor, unloading trucks, moving merchandise, sweeping up, anything for immediate pay. At night many drink themselves to sleep. Some have crack or other dope habits to support. Most, but not all, are black or Puerto Rican.

If, then, we must have an underclass category, these men and others like them are good candidates for it. The bottom ranks of the working class always have men and women who are the most exploited and who, despite their hard work, cannot keep body and soul together. Sometimes such people are called wage slaves (Alec Wilkinson's book *Big Sugar* is a moving account of rural and migrant wage slavery). But homelessness and destitution in addition, as George Orwell showed in *Down and Out in Paris and London,* become a form of prison (with wage slavery) in the bosom of civil society. The homeless person can become locked into a round of daily survival behaviors, the search for food, for coins, for warmth, for an anodyne, for sleep. Increasingly most kinds of work except the most casual come to be out of reach for one reason or another, apart from how well the economy is doing. Life on the street soon destroys most people. Sleep deprivation, hunger, cold, sickness, and depression quickly take a toll. Men (and women) like these windshield wipers inhabit a despised street world intimately tied to the "regular economy," which that economy in fact produces in the backs of restaurants and in all the growing markets for casual labor and "lower overhead."

What about the children these men may have fathered along the way to their precarious adulthoods? Are they also to be thought of as part of the underclass? Suppose, as is often likely, the children are living with mothers who are on welfare. Some of their mothers may have had a few children by different fathers and been on welfare for years. Are "chronic" welfare mothers and their children also part of the underclass?

In most definitions of the term, welfare mothers who are on public assistance for more than three years and have additional children while on assistance are classified as "chronic welfare recipients" and are considered as part of the underclass. I reject this idea.

A mother of dependent children has real work to do and a mother with no regular male help has even more work. This should not be a controversial assertion. Middle-class mothers who choose to stay home in order to raise children often zealously defend their choice. They do not look kindly on suggestions that their lives are leisurely even if they also admit their good fortune in not "needing to go to work right away." Welfare mothers have even more obstacles to surmount since just existing on welfare is hard work itself. And few welfare mothers can actually exist on AFDC benefits, Medicaid, and food stamps. Almost all seek additional income, from off-the-books work, like caring for others' children along with their own, or in innumerable "hustles." And if receiving welfare payments was such a cushy way of life, welfare mothers would be expected to migrate from states with lower benefits to those with higher ones. But there is no evidence that such migration occurs. Instead, the women typically plan ways of improving their education or finding a decent job or forming a stable relationship, all the things any of us would try in order to "get on our feet." Now the welfare laws increasingly push women to get back into the labor market when their children are old enough to be in day care, but of course we have yet to develop anything like an adequate day-care system.

Yet to exclude all mothers on welfare from even my narrow and reluctant definition of an underclass would not well reflect the suffering and neglect we see around us in cities like New York and Chicago and in hundreds of other American communities large and small. Women without homes, mothers and children without homes, all run the risk that homelessness itself becomes an insurmountable and debilitating obstacle. Welfare mothers who become addicted or who become entrapped in a world of prostitution and unsuccessful petty

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crime, or whose material and emotional lives have disintegrated to the point that they neglect and abuse their children, all can be thought to have fallen into the lowest ranks of poverty and misery. AIDS workers like Victor Ayala (see box) would agree that indigent AIDS patients, surely down and out, might also be counted among an underclass, but he believes the term serves little purpose except to excuse our ignorance of the AIDS epidemic.

There are also children who fall into extreme poverty and risk living out brutally shortened lives at the bottom. One of the best recent books about this subject is Terry Williams's *Cocaine Kids*, a detailed ethnography of the lives of teenagers in upper Manhattan who become involved in the world of crack dealing. Williams and others have shown that existing drug laws encourage adult dealers to recruit children into the underground drug industry. There are a few cases of teenagers who become wildly successful and even more cases of teenagers who make some money for a while before getting into trouble with the authorities or within the drug underworld. Williams shows that those who begin using drugs, other than marijuana, quickly decline and are cast out, often to drift into trouble or violence. Kids with records of arrest, failure in school, histories of drug abuse and depression, and with only limited training for employment and few contacts in labor markets are prime candidates for lives as windshield washers and street-corner junkies. But if they are not trapped into such lives because of homelessness or severe debilitation, they should not be counted among those who are down and out. Though at risk of falling, they have not yet dropped into the underclass. Whether they do so or not will depend a good deal on the opportunities our society makes available to them to help themselves. It will also depend on the kind of adult mentors it provides them.

In sum, as I use the term, the underclass includes those people who are trapped in a netherworld at the bottom of both the legal and illegal class systems. The major traps are addiction, homelessness, mental illness, destitution, and usually a combination of these conditions. Although their numbers are growing steadily, especially in central cities and segregated ghettos, the size of this population is far lower than the overall poverty population (which has also been growing). As a spur to social policy a narrow definition of the underclass does not detract from the argument by Wilson and others that we urgently need industrial policies targeted toward economically depressed communities. The idea that the underclass is relatively small and is composed of people who have fallen out of the working or criminal classes (or who never made it up before becoming trapped at the bottom) will help emphasize the special programs of emergency housing, supported work, drug rehabilitation, enhanced schooling in low-income communities, and other measures that could reduce destitution and homelessness. If the down-and-out make up no more than three million people (including the nation's present homeless population), we ought to be able to immediately reduce that number.

We ought to be able to help, that is, if we can ever overcome the consequences of all the theft of public funds and the vicious attacks on our social institutions that has marked the past decade. In fact, by my definition of the underclass there is not a major new social class to trumpet about or to blame on welfare institutions. There is instead a significant growth in old-style misery, due in some part to industrial restructuring and in another and more evil part to the cupidity of the nation's elite. History will show that for some time toward the end of our American Century the nation's upper class, or the part of it in power, embraced a philosophy of narrow self-interest first elaborated by Bernard Mandeville in his tract of 1705, *The Grumbling Hive* (later expanded into *The Fable of the Bees*). Mandeville coined the phrase, "Private vice makes public virtue." Someone might want to offer this profound insight to the corner windshield washers or to the homeless people huddled outside the gates of the White House.□

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Robert Kuttner

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

Clashing Theories About the "Underclass"

Ever since Marx's musings about the lumpenproletariat, the "underclass" has unnerved the left. Members of an underclass rarely behave in a manner leftists consider politically appropriate to their condition, let alone a manner that invites sympathy from a broader public. To be in the underclass, almost by definition, is to be unkempt, unmotivated, unorganized, and, by inference, unworthy. As the beloved Mike Harrington used to quote Dorothy Day, the poor are poor not only in money.

Now, in late twentieth-century America, the new growth of an underclass again has troubling, double-edged implications. On the one hand, it suggests the persistent failure of our market economy to spread wealth and opportunity evenly and the suspicion that postindustrial capitalist society is simply discarding those at the bottom of the social ladder. It indicates persistent and perhaps deepening racial isolation, as well as intractable poverty. During America's flush years, when left critics had a hard time indicting American capitalism wholesale, "pockets of poverty"—the immediate forerunner of the current underclass—was the left's high ground of attack in its insistence that all was not well. If the left has anything, it has class, so to say.

But now that the existence of an American underclass is palpable—and worsening—the left, ironically, has grown increasingly uncomfortable with the very idea. Broadly speaking, the reason is that the images of the underclass, media treatment of it, and the middle class's practical experience of it, raise the hoary question of blame. Liberals and leftists characteristically look to social causes of social distress. But to the casual eye and to conservative ideologues, at least some of the plight of the underclass is either self-inflicted or inflicted by the misincentives of the welfare state, which are said to reward social misbehavior. This thesis was crystalized in Charles Murray's famous *Losing Ground* (1986), which tallied the alleged rising benefits of welfare relative to those of paid employment and concluded that increasing numbers of poor people were seduced into the welfare life by the state's excess generosity. Much of Murray's arithmetic, as well as his mismatched time sequence, has since been discredited. But the thesis, as they say, resonated. It is also awkward that so many of the alleged underclass are black—this after three decades of ostensible liberal successes with compensatory spending on education as well as politically costly affirmative action programs.

To be in the underclass, it seems, is to lack the usual bourgeois virtues of diligence, upward striving, thrift, self-restraint, discipline of one's children, and so on—virtues that educated white radicals of my generation disdained in our youth, though, unlike the ghetto poor, we had an almost effortless chance to reclaim them as adults. Increasingly, "underclass" has become something close to a synonym for the undeserving or profligate poor. The usual explanations of structural unemployment, inadequate housing and education, even the legacy of racism, lose much of their resonance against the reality of a junkie, a middle-class kid panhandling, or a crack-using teen mother, or other seemingly irresponsible

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forms of urban lowlife consuming scarce resources from the tax dollars of the working and middle classes. In the process, the underclass has become almost as much an embarrassment for the left as for the capitalist system—a venerable dilemma familiar to connoisseurs of the literature of lumpenproletariat. And as the homeless, the drug dependent, and the often aggressive panhandlers of the underclass overwhelm subways, shelters, and safe neighborhoods, a blend of guilt, annoyance, fear, and finally rage often subverts the impulse of more careful social analysis. More than one New Yorker with "good politics" has become more disgusted than radicalized, watching good public institutions like subways or parks, or even libraries, overwhelmed by the wretched refuse of the new underclass. Weren't our parents or grandparents just as poor? Aren't those diligent Korean grocers just as disadvantaged?

Perhaps not. It is worth disentangling the diverse subgroups that have been lumped together in America's lumpen. Even casual empiricism suggests that the new underclass includes the mentally ill, homeless people who have "fallen out of the middle class" because of worsening economic conditions, neglected or abused children, as well as those arguably at personal fault, such as addicts and petty criminals. In assessing personal blame, one must also acknowledge that membership in the underclass often reflects ostensible "choices" that are barely choices at all, given the paucity of plausible alternatives. As the revisionist literature on teen pregnancy suggests, a young woman "choosing" to be casual about birth control, taking a risk of getting pregnant, may have concluded, even if not via a systematic and deliberate evaluation, that bearing a child may be the least bleak of a series of bleak alternatives. And a poorly educated youth, abused or ignored in early childhood, may turn to using or dealing drugs because the imaginable straight career ladders out of poverty are so remote.

Still, these are not entirely satisfactory explanations. So it is necessary to go back to first principles and ask, first, whether the underclass is really a useful or a fair construct; second, whether we care to acknowledge that a component of the conservative attribution of personal irresponsibility is fair; third, how we might enrich the social explanation of the underclass; and finally (and most important), what we might do about it.

Herbert Gans, for one, has argued against the use of the word, as bad social science and loaded politics. "The term," writes Gans, "has taken on so many connotations of undeservingness and blameworthiness that it has become hopelessly polluted in meaning, and should be dropped—with the issues involved studied via other concepts" (*APA Journal*, Summer 1990). For Gans, the term has often been used to signify deviance from middle-class norms, even behavior that is not harmful per se, such as common-law marriage, as well as a racial code word. Gans also argues, convincingly, that thinking of diverse social maladies as embodied in a single "underclass" of the isolated and presumably undeserving poor reinforces the conservative claims about the futility or perversity of policy. For, if certain forms of poverty are intractable, and if policies backfire, and if some conditions are self-inflicted, why intervene?

I will argue, uneasily, that on balance the term is too useful to drop, though I think Gans's caveats are all worth keeping in mind. In deconstructing the underclass, as Gans urges us to do, it is worth differentiating criminal behavior from mental illness and from plain poverty, especially poverty connected to racial isolation and hostility. As a middle-class person walks down, say, upper Broadway, fearing for personal safety, all three concerns are too easy to lump together as common blights on peace of mind, neighborhood, and the public fisc.

Let us begin with the most stereotypical members of the alleged underclass—"welfare mothers." Here, the charge (Murray's) is that public policy has encouraged socially destructive behavior: casual, illegitimate birth, long-term dependency, and chronic cheating. Defenders of the welfare state include as a rhetorical staple the observation that a majority of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients actually go on and off

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welfare for relatively brief periods of time, with changing economic circumstances; and that as a proxy for the underclass the AFDC population is actually a shifting collection of people, at least half of them Caucasian, rather than the caricatured hard-core, socially isolated poor. Still, there is a segment of AFDC families, approximately 25 to 30 percent, that in fact stay on AFDC for years at a stretch, just as there are indeed multigeneration AFDC families. So if the underclass takes in diverse sorts of people, it is also true that the hard-core, socially isolated poor do exist, just as a culture of homelessness exists.

Therefore, rather than attacking the very word, it is worthwhile investigating the logic of why different kinds of social isolation exist and are increasing. In this connection, other social scientists with equally good democratic left credentials, such as Christopher Jencks and William Julius Wilson, seem to think that an identifiable underclass does exist, that it is a useful term, particularly as applied to the economically isolated black poor. Wilson, for his part, straightforwardly embraces the term. Admittedly, he writes in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) "that certain groups are stigmatized by the label underclass . . . but it would be far worse to obscure the profound changes in the class structure and social behavior of ghetto neighborhoods by avoiding the use of the term underclass."

Wilson refers to four basic changes. First, affirmative action made it easier for the most talented blacks to escape the ghetto. Second, at just about the same time, well-paying jobs for unskilled workers began to disappear. These two phenomena meant that ghetto communities became places where the very poor dwelled in much higher concentrations, stripped of leaders, role models, and people whose middle-class values and aspirations were validated by their life courses. At the same time, contrary to Charles Murray's false sequencing, public aid began dropping. And, finally, thanks to these other changes, the ratio of eligible, that is, employed, black potential husbands to prospective black wives began seriously deteriorating. Since the postindustrial economy no longer has economic need for much unskilled labor, and the wages of unskilled labor no longer can support a family, young black men from disadvantaged backgrounds are increasingly likely to be unemployed, behind bars, in the armed forces, or dead. This gender imbalance, and not the perverse welfare incentives in Charles Murray's stilted cost-benefit calculation, explains the appeal of the welfare life for young black women. Create economically attractive alternatives, says Wilson, and most inner-city blacks want the same good life that other Americans want, and will work for it.

Intriguingly, both Wilson and Jencks manage to put a progressive spin on fairly conservative notions about family, responsibility, and incentive. Jencks, with his research associate Kathryn Edin, accepts a good bit of the Murray critique—the better to deflate it. Writing in the *American Prospect* (Spring 1990), Jencks and Edin virtually concede the conservative critique that most welfare recipients are indeed cheating on the system. A look at family budgets shows why this is not surprising. Given the cost of living, the wretchedly low pay of minimum-wage jobs, and the meager welfare check, virtually nobody with a family can afford to live solely on a minimum-wage job or solely on a welfare check. But then, adroitly flipping Murray's inference on its head, Jencks and Edin go on to argue that most welfare recipients indeed want to work—because most are in fact working. This is the dirty little secret about welfare, shared by caseworkers and AFDC recipients alike. Instead of punishing AFDC mothers for working or forcing them to work covertly, says Jencks and Edin, the remedy is to turn the AFDC grant into an overt wage supplement complete with fringe benefits, so that work actually improves economic status.

In the course of making these arguments, critics like Wilson and Jencks, and other friends of active social policy, such as Theda Skocpol and Robert Greenstein, David Ellwood and Mary Jo Bane, end up embracing fairly mainstream notions about work, family, and the work ethic. In their view, the solution to economic isolation is to offer greater reward for working, not to reduce the already meager benefits of the social wage. This will change

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relative incentives and make it economically possible for more of the underclass to join the economic mainstream and share in both its rewards and its norms. It also has the benefit of conforming to the value systems of the broader public about what it takes to be the "deserving" poor. The voters will support far more outlay directed to rewarding work than rewarding idleness.

This shift deserves more than a moment's reflection. Such notions about what constitutes a healthy family, and whether it is reasonable to expect people to work, are indeed scarcely different from conservative ones, save for the conservative preference for the traditional family in which papa works and mother raises children. But strip away the patriarchal character of the traditional family, and this conservative-sounding set of values is, I believe, entirely appropriate. For the ideal of intact families and of rewarding labor, like the ideal of safe neighborhoods, is simply too attractive per se and too widely shared to leave by default to the political right.

By way of specific remedy, Wilson and the others mentioned above propose a diverse array of policy measures, all intended to bolster the rewards of work. These include some form of wage subsidy, either a package of socially financed fringe benefits triggered by membership in the paid work force or an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit. Skocpol has insisted that to succeed both politically and substantively, the programs need to be universal ones, which serve the entire population regardless of income, rather than means-tested ones that stigmatize the poor, invade privacy, and create perverse incentives for staying poor. She argues, as I have, that you can nonetheless accomplish a good deal of practical targeting of the needy within universal programs, in part by adjusting benefit formulas and in part because it is the poor who would be deprived in the absence of the program.

In contrast, Robert Greenstein has argued that it is politically implausible to imagine that Congress will pass expensive new universal social programs in any foreseeable future and that, contrary to Skocpol's belief, it really is politically possible and technically feasible to have programs targeted at the poor—as long as the programs resonate with mainstream values such as work and the intact family. His most convincing example is the Earned Income Tax Credit, which is really a family allowance based on family size that supplements paid employment. However, you can't receive it except as a supplement to paid labor, and unlike AFDC it doesn't break up families. It is technically means tested, in the sense that it phases out at family incomes of roughly $20,000, but it doesn't feel means tested. It is simply a credit against income taxes, and if income is low enough the worker actually receives a check from the government.

These debates about the relative merits of greater or lesser targeting and means testing are worth another article. For our purposes, all of these critics are essentially on the same side of the underclass debate, and their remedy boils down to the same thought: Increase the rewards of work, make it possible to reconcile work and family, and most people will opt out of the underclass.

Will they? If history is any guide, they probably will. When full employment at decent wages suddenly materialized during World War II, entire cultures of poverty and economic isolation vanished almost overnight. Stable black working-class communities in northern cities, which were the result of migration to factory work stimulated initially by World War I, became pathological underclass communities only when well-paid work evaporated.

But it is not entirely clear that these policies address all of the several pathologies of the underclass or that they can be executed at a politically bearable price, or that they can overcome the profound legacy of racism, or that there are easy answers to the related plagues of drugs, AIDS, and escalating urban crime. In this respect, we would do well to heed Gans's advice to at least disentangle the meanings, if not to discard the term.

Some hopeful observers have pointed, naively, I'd say, to an emerging left-right consensus about welfare. In this view, the left supposedly agrees that AFDC has failed and

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that work and intact family life are good things, while the right agrees that if the incentives can be straightened out it becomes salutary for government to spend some money. This supposedly undergirded the welfare-reform legislation of 1988. The only fallacy in this supposed entente is that the right has agreed to nothing of the sort. While some bleeding-heart conservatives, notably Jack Kemp and some people associated with the Heritage Society, are indeed willing to see government spend more money if that's what it takes to bring the virtuous poor into the economic mainstream, this is by no means the majority conservative view, least of all the view of the Bush Office of Management and Budget. Even some alleged liberals, such as Mickey Kaus, have endorsed a version of workfare that was more punitive than helpful to an escape from poverty.

At a time of static productivity growth and chronically slow economic growth, any redistributionist policies are difficult politics, especially when their recipients are people suspected to be at least partly at fault for their own dismal condition. A national policy to raise the rewards of work, via a blend of earned income tax credits, child care and medical care entitlements, and the like would cost in the range of $20 to 50 billion. In reality it would cost more than this, for it is very hard to imagine giving a new set of entitlements to the hard-core poor without extending them to all working Americans. Otherwise, we are right back to the usual problems of poverty traps and the political impossibility of subsidizing the $4.00 an hour poor but not the $7.00 an hour poor. In this respect, I think Skocpol and Wilson are right; you can "target within universalism"—but first you have to have a critical mass of universalism.

It's also clear from the work of Lisbeth Schorr and Sheila Kamerman and an extensive body of longitudinal work on Head Start that compensatory programs for children can bear real fruit. However, the worse the conditions of the underclass—the poorer, more neglectful, abusive, and disorganized the parents—the earlier the compensatory programs must start in order to make a difference. The philanthropist and child advocate Irving Harris has contended, in response to genetic or racist theories of the underclass, that virtually all of the difference in performance of young, inner-city black children can be accounted for by the lack of healthy stimulation in the first two years of life. But here again, the solutions are not cheap.

Even if we agree that the mainstreaming of the hard-core minority poor is economically and sociologically feasible, if costly, that still leaves us with other horrific problems associated with the underclass—drugs, crime, homelessness, untreated mental illness, to mention just four. Just as people like Jencks, Skocpol, and others found themselves embracing solutions that turned out to be a mix of the radical and the conservative, I suspect the same is true of solutions to these other troubling conditions.

Of the several strands of social pathology that underlie the underclass, homelessness is at least the easiest to solve in principle. We now know that the culture of homelessness reflects two fairly distinct causes—the failure of the deinstitutionalization experiment of the 1960s, coupled with rising housing costs and disinvestment in social housing in the 1980s. Create decent low-rent housing on the one hand and decent community mental health facilities on the other, and much homelessness would disappear, just as earlier Hoovervilles disappeared with wartime and postwar prosperity. Western Europe has no underclass (with the not accidental exception of Thatcherite Britain), and Western Europe does not expect market economics to provide sufficient housing.

Drugs and violent crime—these are much harder. The connection between the drug and criminal underclass is that crime and drugs thrive on persistent poverty and despair. About this basic fact the time-honored left insistence that we look to deeper social causes remains accurate. Few people with more attractive alternatives will choose a life of street crime or drug addiction. Otherwise, the entire society would be stoned most of the time. However, once a drug culture takes hold, it is not easy to dislodge. The solution, I suspect, would require a blend of radical and conservative principles that do not neatly fit ideological pigeonholes. In the case of drugs, substantial decriminalization may be cheaper and more

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socially benign than making the sale of drugs an immensely profitable criminal enterprise that diverts police and court resources. Yet advocates of decriminalization still need to answer the charge that the drugs themselves have become more antisocial. With heroin, it was the need for the money to buy the drug that induced the criminal behavior. But in the case of many currently popular drugs, like cocaine, the violence can be induced by the drug itself. (This is of course also true of alcohol, our most popular drug.)

On the other hand, we would do well to become much less tolerant of crime and to be more solicitous of the rights of its victims, most of whom are also poor and black. Recently Gordon Crovitz of the *Wall Street Journal*, not a writer I frequently cite approvingly, ran the rap sheet on a man named Brian Lawrence, aged 30, who was finally charged with murder, after a string of lesser though still very brutal crimes that the criminal justice system had treated with astonishing casualness. Of his first seven arrests for robbery, burglary, or attempted burglary, he plea bargained all seven, and only one resulted in a brief jail term. He then committed seven more crimes for which the authorities caught him, and by his own account thousands more purse snatchings, muggings, assaults, and so on—several a day over a decade—for which he escaped arrest. Finally, a year ago, he made the mistake of pushing under a subway a young waitress whose purse he was attempting to grab. She died. He is awaiting trial for murder.

I have never understood why so many smart people essentially pose the choice as either treating the social causes of crime or getting tougher with criminals. It should be obvious that we need to do both. One can address the root causes of social pathology with enlightened social policies and still hold individuals accountable for their actions. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any viable society that would do less. Pascal's most famous *pensée—Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*—was simply wrong, except as applied to divine justice. No matter how much we understand, some acts are not socially forgivable unless we are damned fools. If we follow that principle to its logical conclusion, we end up forgiving all street thugs, and even Hitler.

Getting tough does not mean longer prison sentences—some forms of supervised diversion and even short-term "shock incarceration" evidently reduce recidivism—but it does mean increasing the chance that criminals will be caught and punished. As a taxpayer and American citizen with "good politics," I expect and demand reasonably safe streets. I gave, as it were, at the office. I should not give again at the price of my personal security. At the same time, as Wilson, Jencks, Skocpol, Greenstein, and others suggest, society also needs to widen the rewards of socially responsible behavior, especially for those who have been most disadvantaged by our most appalling legacy—racism.

As I get older, my sense of what is radical and what is conservative—and what blend is desirable—keeps shifting. I find myself more conservative in my conception of what is sensible with respect to the work ethic, to family, to self-discipline, to "standards." Yet I find myself more radical in my insistence that these perquisites of a fairly middle-class life be available to all citizens. That still leaves room for an extraordinary cultural diversity; it still allows voluntary bohemias that do not espouse middle-class norms, yet do not threaten public facilities and physical safety. The notable change on the part of left critics of the welfare state is that we have again embraced work and family, ideals we never should have conceded to the right. And while doing so we must still insist that work needs to be more rewarding, that families need to be more democratic, and that society needs to acknowledge how the relationship between work and family has drastically changed as roles have changed.

Despite the worsening condition of our streets and neighborhoods and the tighter tangle of ghetto pathologies, we can still remedy the diverse, often interconnected ills that parade under the common and often misleading label "underclass"—if we take the trouble to understand them. But it does not present a simple politics. And it will not be cheap. □

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Peter Kornblum

LITERARY VISIONS OF THE POOR

The "common people," Walt Whitman observed in 1871, are too often "degraded, humiliated, made of no account." American democracy must uplift "the specimens and vast collections of the ignorant, the credulous, the unfit and uncouth, the incapable, and the very low and poor." Profound social change, according to Whitman, can promise new hope for American democracy, "with a more universal ownership of property, general homesteads, general comfort—a vast, intertwining reticulation of wealth."

The development of American literary realism and naturalism often reflects the eclipse of Whitman's hope for "general comfort" and "universal ownership of property." In 1906 Upton Sinclair described the daily roundup of homeless beggars from the streets of Chicago: "[I]n the detention hospital you might see them, herded together in a miniature inferno, with hideous beastly faces, bloated and leprous with disease, laughing, shouting, screaming in all stages of drunkenness, barking like dogs, gibbering like apes, raving and tearing themselves in delirium." Sinclair's hero-victim in *The Jungle*, Jurgis Rudkus, is tossed out to the "city's cesspools" since he "had lost in the fierce battle of greed, and so was doomed to be exterminated." Thirty-five years after Whitman's passionate plea for an equalizing "mission of government," Sinclair testified to the persistent gap between social extremes.

Our early images of an underclass focus on objective conditions, the squalid details of urban misery rendered by alert observers. The *New York Sun*'s Jacob Riis provided a guide to the hidden realities of the metropolis: "Leaving the Elevated Railroad where it dives under the Brooklyn Bridge at Franklin Square, scarce a dozen steps will take you where we wish to go . . . with its rush and roar echoing yet in our ears we have turned the corner from prosperity to poverty." The anonymous city drifter in Stephen Crane's story "An Experiment in Misery" (1898) has long since turned that corner: "The roar of the city in his ear was to him the confusion of strange tongues, babbling heedlessly; it was the clink of coin, the voice of the city's hopes, which were to him no hopes." Writing in 1903, Jack London portrayed the "chaos of misery" that reduced an entire community, East London, to "vast shambles." The festering underclass in London's *The People of the Abyss* know that "work of the world," in London's words, "goes on above them," and indeed, "the work of the world does not need them." In this "City of Degradation" one out of every four adults "is destined to die on public charity." At the same moment, in another part of town, the English royalty squanders "$1,850,000,000" in "wasteful luxury." Five years later, in *The Iron Heel*, London delineated a similar doom for America. In a fictionalized Chicago of the future, the "condition of the people of the abyss was pitiable . . . they lived like beasts in great squalid labor ghettos, festering in misery and degradation."

More recent images of an underclass tend to blur the lines of mimesis and protest characterizing earlier American naturalism. The merging of perceiver and reality is especially prominent in the writing of Saul Bellow. The discontent of Bellow's meditative protagonists often finds its objective correlative in the urban wasteland. If there is an underclass, it can only be experienced through the eyes of Bellow's typically humanistic but vulnerable observer.

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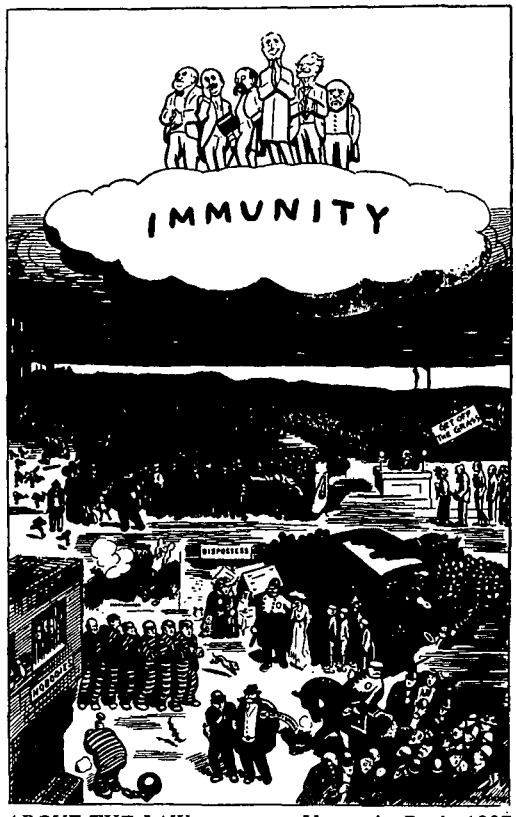
In a short story of the early fifties, "Looking for Mr. Green," George Grebe is a "man of culture," a former classicist now attempting to "acquit himself decently" as an inner-city social worker. The underclass, as personified in the elusive welfare recipient, Mr. Green, can only be revealed through Grebe's search. Outside of such concerned messengers, urban statistics like Mr. Green exist as part of a nameless and reprehensible mass. In the words of a local grocer who is unable to help Grebe locate Mr. Green, "Nobody would get to know even a tenth of what went on among these people. They stabbed and stole, they did every crime and abomination you ever heard of, men and men, women and women, parents and children, worse than animals."

Like George Grebe, Albert Corde in *The Dean's December* (1982) consciously *looks* for the "doomed people." Others seek "opportunistically" to contain or "hustle" the "doomed population of blacks—the underclass." Corde is more directly affected by the "great hordes" in the alarming "city of destruction." The underclass, their "turbulence and whirling states," are more, for Corde, than distant statistics. The Dean seeks a heroic encounter with "the slums we carry around inside us. Every man's *inner* inner city . . ."

For Albert Corde, "[C]ities were moods, emotional states," and Bellow has explored such moods in New York as well as Chicago. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) the elderly protagonist steps gingerly about New York, watching out for the "lunatics" and "the minority mobs." The urban underclass, for Arthur Sammler, endures an internal condition, the "humiliations of inconsequence," which has also haunted Mr. Sammler's own refugee history.

In Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), in place of Bellow's concerned spokesmen, we have the Ivy League dynamo and supertrader, Sherman McCoy, suddenly exposed to the violent appetites of an avenging Bronx mob—"the sounds, the orotund tropes and sententiae, the falsetto songs, the inquisitory shouts, the hippo mutterings." Wolfe's empathy rests with McCoy, fallen "Master of the Universe," rather than with the swarming unemployed hordes clamoring to convict and imprison the Park Avenue Yalie. Pushing his way out of a Bronx courthouse, McCoy stubbornly confronts the "leaderless" and "ugly mob." Exposed to the deepest threats of the New York "Congo," McCoy still stands in the name of "a sane and decent world." Moments of amusing description and clever caricature cannot mask the vacuous quality of Wolfe's social vision. The narrative is replete with trite images of the urban crisis. Unlike Bellow, Tom Wolfe does not actually *care* about the consequences of urban decay. Those who speak with concern of the underclass are self-seekers, promoting their own interests.



ABOVE THE LAW —Young in *Puck*, 1907

The black underclass is reduced to annoying "insects" in Wolfe's best-selling fiction machine. Readers can do well to find deeper, more thoughtful images in the writing of John Edgar Wideman, most especially in his detailed portrait of "Homewood," a black neighbor-

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hood in Pittsburgh. In *Brothers and Keepers* (1984) Wideman traces his younger brother's descent into underclass despair and his own problematic assimilation as an intellectual achiever. Wideman uses his brother Robby's own words to convey the "chaos of a whirling soul, out there in the street doing wrong." The pathos of Robby "going nowhere," of "everything coming down on me," is set off against another kind of difficulty. In his steps toward achievement, Wideman has been forced to practice a special mode of looking, always prepared to take "second readings, decode appearances, pick out obstructions erected to keep you in your place." Robby was tempted by the "bright lights winking right in front of his face, just beyond his fingertips." Wary of these seductive lights, his older brother has adopted a protective armor, a "systematic skepticism." The possibility of survival hinges on a thorough distrust of the "visible landscape." Joining the vanities of class to the injuries of underclass, Wideman looks for the common meaning beneath Robby's visible chains: ". . . the bad news that we still walk in circles, each of us trapped in his own little world. Behind bars. Locked in our cells."

Many of the poems of Philip Levine present trenchant images of the urban landscape. Reflecting on his experience of such cities as Detroit and Fresno, Levine has commented that each displayed a "vitality" that depended on "exploited people who live like shit while there were the suburbs of the rich who enjoyed their privileges." Levine asserts the importance of dealing "with what is ugly, with punishing lives." His images, culled often from "the shittiest goddamn circumstances," point toward "the end of ownership, the end of competitiveness, the end of a great deal of things that are ugly."

In a poem of 1972, "Saturday Sweeping," Levine evokes an image of struggling survival amid decaying institutions: "Half/the men in this town/are crying in/the snow, their eyes/ blackened like/Chinese soldiers./The Gates are closing/at Dodge Main/and Wyandotte Chemical." More recently, in "A Walk with Tom Jefferson" (1988), Levine has focused on the fortitude and spiritual vigor of an underclass figure, an elderly Detroit black. When today's Tom Jefferson speaks, "his arms spread wide to/include block after block/of dumping grounds." Yet he remains sanguine and unperturbed since "Tom Jefferson is a believer." The troubled, disenchanted narrator only finds evidence of our imminent doom and "degradation," a fate that approaches like "iron in the wind." In Levine's city of despair, "the poor White" is "fighting the poor Black" for "the same gray concrete housing,/ the same gray jobs/they both came north for." A man of "Biblical" vision rather than skeptical intellect, Jefferson refuses to admit "all this is a lost land." Instead, this unassuming but dignified character "smiles and says the one word, 'Tomorrow,' and goes in . . ." □

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Cornel West

NIHILISM IN BLACK AMERICA

A Danger That Corrodes from Within

Recent discussions about the plight of African Americans—especially those at the bottom of the social ladder—tend to divide into two camps. On the one hand, there are those who highlight the *structural* constraints on the life chances of black people. This viewpoint involves a subtle historical and sociological analysis of slavery, Jim Crowism, job and residential discrimination, skewed unemployment rates, inadequate health care and poor education. On the other hand, there are those who stress the *behavioral* impediments on black upward mobility. This focuses on the waning of the Protestant ethic—hard work, deferred gratification, frugality, and responsibility—in much of black America.

Those in the first camp—the liberal structuralists—call for full employment, health, education and child-care programs, and broad affirmative action practices. In short, a new, more sober version of the best of the New Deal and the Great Society: more government money, better bureaucrats, and an active citizenry. Those in the second camp—the conservative behaviorists—promote self-help programs, black business expansion, and nonpreferential job practices. They support vigorous "free market" strategies that depend on fundamental changes in how black people act and live. To put it bluntly, their projects rest largely upon a cultural revival of the Protestant ethic in black America.

Unfortunately, these two camps have nearly suffocated the crucial debate that should be taking place about the prospects for black America. This debate must go far beyond the liberal and conservative positions in three fundamental ways. First, we must acknowledge that structures and behavior are inseparable, that institutions and values go hand in hand. How people act and live are shaped—though in no way dictated or determined—by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves. These circumstances can be changed, their limits attenuated, by positive actions to elevate living conditions.

Second, we should reject the idea that structures are primarily economic and political creatures—an idea that sees culture as an ephemeral set of behavioral attitudes and values. Culture is quite as structural as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions like families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries (television, radio, video, music). Similarly, the economy and politics are not only influenced by values but also promote particular cultural ideals of the good life and good society.

Third, and most important, we must delve into the depths where neither liberals nor conservatives dare to tread, namely, into the murky waters of despair and dread that now flood the streets of black America. To talk about the depressing statistics of unemployment, infant mortality, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, and violent crime is one thing. But to face up to the monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America is something else.

The liberal/conservative discussion conceals the most basic issue now facing black America: *the nihilistic threat to its very existence*. This

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threat is not simply a matter of relative economic deprivation and political powerlessness—though economic well-being and political clout are requisites for meaningful black progress. It is primarily a question of speaking to the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair so widespread in black America.

The liberal structuralists fail to grapple with this threat for two reasons. First, their focus on structural constraints relates almost exclusively to the economy and politics. They show no understanding of the structural character of culture. Why? Because they tend to view people in egoistic and rationalist terms according to which they are motivated primarily by self-interest and self-preservation. Needless to say, this is partly true about most of us. Yet, people, especially degraded and oppressed people, are also hungry for identity, meaning, and self-worth.

The second reason liberal structuralists overlook the nihilistic threat is a sheer failure of nerve. They hesitate to talk honestly about culture, the realm of meanings and values, because to do so may seem to lend itself too readily to conservative conclusions in the narrow way Americans discuss race. If there is a hidden taboo among liberals it is to resist talking about values *too much* because it takes the focus away from structures, especially the positive role of government. But this failure leaves the existential and psychological realities of black people in the lurch. In this way, liberal structuralists neglect the battered identities rampant in black America.

As for the conservative behaviorists, they not only misconstrue the nihilistic threat but inadvertently contribute to it. This is a serious charge, and it rests upon three claims. First, conservative behaviorists talk about values and attitudes as if political and economic structures hardly exist. They rarely, if ever, examine the innumerable cases in which black people do act on the Protestant ethic and still remain at the bottom of the social ladder. Instead, they highlight the few instances in which blacks ascend to the top, as if such success is available to all blacks, regardless of circumstances. Such a vulgar rendition of Horatio Alger in blackface may serve as a source of inspiration to some—a kind of model for those already on the right track. But it cannot serve as a substitute for serious historical and social analysis of the predicaments of and prospects for all black people, especially the grossly disadvantaged ones.

Second, conservative behaviorists discuss black culture as if acknowledging one's obvious victimization by white supremacist practices (compounded by sexism and class condition) is taboo. They tell black people to see themselves as agents, not victims. And on the surface, this is comforting advice, a nice cliché for downtrodden people. But inspirational slogans cannot substitute for substantive historical and social analysis. While black people have never been simply victims, wallowing in self-pity and begging for white giveaways, they have been—and are—*victimized*. Therefore, to call on black people to be agents makes sense only if we also examine the dynamics of this victimization against which their agency will, in part, be exercised. What is particularly naive and peculiarly vicious about the conservative behavioral outlook is that it tends to deny the lingering effect of black history—a history inseparable from though not reducible to victimization. In this way, crucial and indispensable themes of self-help and personal responsibility are wrenched out of historical context and contemporary circumstances—as if it is all a matter of personal will.

This ahistorical perspective contributes to the nihilistic threat within black America in that it can be used to justify right-wing cutbacks for poor people struggling for decent housing, child care, health care, and education. And, as I pointed out earlier, while liberals are deficient in important ways, they are right on target in their critique of conservative government cutbacks for services to the poor. These ghastly cutbacks are one cause of the nihilist threat to black America.

The proper starting point for the crucial debate about the prospects for black America is the nihilism that increasingly pervades black communities. *Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or*

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authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. This usually results in a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.

Nihilism is not new in black America. The first African encounter with the New World was an encounter with a distinctive form of the Absurd. The initial black struggle against degradation and devaluation in the enslaved circumstances of the New World was, in part, a struggle against nihilism. In fact, the major enemy of black survival in America has been and is neither oppression nor exploitation but rather the nihilistic threat—that is, loss of hope and absence of meaning. For as long as hope remains and meaning is preserved, the possibility of overcoming oppression stays alive. The self-fulfilling prophecy of the nihilistic threat is that without hope there can be no future, that without meaning there can be no struggle.

The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness. These buffers consisted of cultural structures of meaning and feeling that created and sustained communities; this armor constituted ways of life and struggle that embodied values of service and sacrifice, love and care, discipline and excellence. In other words, traditions for black surviving and thriving under usually adverse New World conditions were major barriers against the nihilistic threat. These traditions consist primarily of black religious and civic institutions that sustained familial and communal networks of support. If cultures are, in part, what human beings create (out of antecedent fragments of other cultures) in order to convince themselves not to commit suicide, then black foremothers and forefathers are to be applauded. In fact, until the early seventies black Americans had the lowest suicide rate in the United States. But now young black people lead the nation in suicides.

What has changed? What went wrong? The bitter irony of integration? The cumulative effects of a genocidal conspiracy? The virtual collapse of rising expectations after the optimistic sixties? None of us fully understands why the nihilistic threat is more powerful now than ever before. I believe that the commodification of black life and the crisis of black leadership are two basic reasons. The recent shattering of black civil society—black families, neighborhoods, schools, churches, mosques—leaves more and more black people vulnerable to the nihilistic threat. This shattering spawns a deracinated and denuded people with little sense of self or existential moorings.

Black people have always been in America's wilderness in search of a promised land. Yet many black folk now reside in a jungle with a cutthroat morality devoid of any faith in deliverance or hope for freedom. Contrary to the superficial claims of conservative behaviorists, these jungles are not primarily the result of pathological behavior. Rather, this behavior is the tragic response of a people bereft of resources in confronting the workings of U.S. capitalist society. This does not mean that individual black people are not responsible for their actions—black murderers and rapists should go to jail. But it does mean that the nihilistic threat contributes to criminal behavior—a threat that feeds on poverty *and* shattered cultural institutions. The nihilistic threat is now more powerful than even before because the armors to ward against it is weaker.

But why this shattering of black civil society, this weakening of black cultural institutions in asphalt jungles? *Corporate market institutions* have contributed greatly to this situation. By corporate market institutions I mean that complex set of interlocking enterprises that have a disproportionate amount of capital, power, and influence on how our society is run and on how our culture is shaped. Needless to say, the primary motivation of these institutions is to make profits, and their basic strategy is to convince the public to consume. These institutions have helped create a seductive way of life, a culture of consumption that capitalizes

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on every opportunity to make money. Market calculations and cost-benefit analyses hold sway in almost every sphere of U.S. society.

The common denominator of these calculations and analyses is usually the provision, expansion, and intensification of *pleasure*. Pleasure is a multivalent term; it means different things to many people. In our way of life it involves comfort, convenience, and sexual stimulation. This mentality pays little heed to the past, and views the future as no more than a repetition of a hedonistic-driven present. This market morality stigmatizes others as objects for personal pleasure or bodily stimulation. On this view, traditional morality is not undermined by radical feminists, cultural radicals in the sixties, or libertarians, as alleged by conservative behaviorists. Rather, corporate market institutions have greatly contributed to undermining traditional morality in order to stay in business and make a profit. This is especially evident in the culture industries—television, radio, video, music—in which gestures of foreplay and orgiastic pleasure flood the marketplace.

Like all Americans, African Americans are influenced greatly by the images of comfort, convenience, machismo, femininity, violence, and sexual stimulation that bombard consumers. These seductive images contribute to the predominance of the market-inspired way of life over all others—and thereby edge out nonmarket values—love, care, service to others—handed down by preceding generations. The predominance of this way of life among those living in poverty-ridden conditions, with a limited capacity to ward off self-contempt and self-hatred, results in the possible triumph of the nihilistic threat in black America.

A major contemporary strategy for holding the nihilistic threat at bay is to attack directly the sense of worthlessness and self-loathing in black America. This *angst* resembles a kind of collective clinical depression in significant pockets of black America. The eclipse of hope and collapse of meaning in much of black America is linked to the structural dynamics of corporate market institutions that affect all Americans. Under these circumstances black existential *angst* derives from the lived experience of ontological wounds and emotional scars inflicted by white supremacist beliefs and images permeating U.S. society and culture. These wounds and scars attack black intelligence, black ability, black beauty, and black character daily in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

The accumulated effect of these wounds and scars produces a deep-seated anger, a boiling sense of rage, and a passionate pessimism regarding America's will to justice. Under conditions of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, this anger, rage, and pessimism remained relatively muted because of a well-justified fear of brutal white retaliation. The major breakthroughs of the sixties—more psychically than politically—swept this fear away. Sadly, the combination of the market way of life, poverty-ridden conditions, black existential *angst,* and the lessening of fear toward white authorities has directed most of the anger, rage, and despair toward fellow black citizens, especially black women. Only recently has this nihilistic threat—and its ugly inhumane outlook and actions—surfaced in the larger American society. And it surely reveals one of the many instances of cultural decay in a declining empire.

What is to be done about this nihilistic threat? Is there really any hope, given our shattered civil society, market-driven corporate enterprises, and white supremacism? If one begins with the threat of concrete nihilism, then one must talk about some kind of *politics of conversion*. New models of collective black leadership must promote a version of this politics. Like alcoholism and drug addiction, nihilism is a disease of the soul. It can never be completely cured and there is always the possibility of relapse. But there is always a chance for conversion—a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. This chance rests neither on an agreement about what justice consists of nor an analysis of how racism, Sexism, or class subordination operate. Such arguments and analyses are indispensable. But a politics of conversion requires more. Nihilism is not

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overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done by one's own affirmation of one's worth—an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. This is why a love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion.

This love ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather it is a last attempt at generating a sense of agency among a downtrodden people. The best exemplar of this love ethic is depicted on a number of levels in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Self-love and love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community. These modes of valuation and resistance are rooted in a subversive memory—the best of one's past without romantic nostalgia—and guided by a universal love ethic. For my purposes here, *Beloved* can be construed as bringing together the loving yet critical affirmation of black humanity found in the best of black nationalist movements, the perennial hope against hope for transracial coalition in progressive movements, and the painful struggle for self-affirming sanity in a history in which the nihilistic threat *seems* insurmountable.

The politics of conversion proceeds principally on the local level—in those institutions in civil society still vital enough to promote self-worth and self-affirmation. It surfaces on the state and national levels only when grass-roots democratic organizations put forward a collective leadership that has earned the love and respect of and, most important, that has proved itself *accountable* to these organizations. This collective leadership must exemplify moral integrity, character, and democratic statesmanship within itself and within its organizations.

Like liberal structuralists, the advocates of a politics of conversion never lose sight of the structural conditions that shape the sufferings and lives of people. Yet, unlike liberal structuralism, the politics of conversion meets the nihilistic threat head-on. Like conservative behaviorism, the politics of conversion openly confronts the self-destructive and inhumane actions of black people. Unlike conservative behaviorists, the politics of conversion situates (not exonerates) these actions within inhumane circumstances. The politics of conversion shuns the limelight—a limelight that solicits status seekers and ingratiates egomaniacs. Instead, it stays on the ground among the toiling everyday people, ushering forth humble freedom fighters—both followers and leaders—who have the audacity to take the nihilistic threat by the neck and turn back its deadly assaults.

The nihilistic threat to black America is inseparable from a crisis in black leadership. This crisis is threefold. First, at the national level, the courageous yet problematic example of Jesse Jackson looms large. On the one hand, his presidential campaigns based on a progressive multiracial coalition were *the* major left-liberal response to Reagan's conservative policies. For the first time since the last days of Martin Luther King, Jr.—with the grand exception of Harold Washington—the nearly *de facto* segregation in U.S. progressive politics was confronted and surmounted. On the other hand, Jackson's televisual style resists grass-roots organizing and, most important, democratic accountability. His brilliance, energy, and charisma sustain his public visibility—but at the expense of programmatic follow-through. We are approaching the moment in which this style exhausts its progressive potential.

Other national nonelectoral black leaders—like Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP and John Jacobs of the National Urban League—rightly highlight the traditional problems of racial discrimination, racial violence, and slow racial progress. Yet their preoccupation with race—the mandate from their organizations—downplays the crucial class, environmental, and patriarchal determinants of black life chances. Black politicians—especially new victors like Mayor David Dinkins of New York City and Governor Douglas Wilder of Virginia—are part of a larger, lethargic electoral system riddled with decreasing revenues, loss of public confidence, self-perpetuating mediocrity, and pervasive corruption. Like most American

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elected officials, few black politicians can sidestep these seductive traps. So black leadership at the national level tends to lack a moral vision that can organize (not just periodically energize), subtle analyses that enlighten (not simply intermittently awaken), and exemplary practices that uplift (not merely convey status that awes) black people.

Second, this relative failure creates vacuums to be filled by bold and defiant black nationalist figures with even narrower visions, one-note racial analyses, and sensationalist practices. Louis Farrakhan, Al Sharpton, and others vigorously attempt to be protest leaders in this myopic mode—a mode often, though not always, reeking of immoral xenophobia. This kind of black leadership is not only symptomatic of black alienation and desperation in a country more and more indifferent or hostile to the quality of life among black working and poor people; it also reinforces the fragmentation of U.S. progressive efforts that could reverse this deplorable plight. In this way, black nationalist leaders often inadvertently contribute to the very impasse they are trying to overcome: inadequate social attention and action to change the plight of America's "invisible people," especially disadvantaged black people.

Third, this crisis of black leadership contributes to political cynicism among black people; it encourages the idea that we cannot really make a difference in changing our society. This cynicism—already promoted by the larger political culture—dampens the fire of engaged *local* activists who have made a difference, yet who also have little interest in being in the national limelight. Rather they engage in protracted grass-roots organizing in principled coalitions that bring power and pressure to bear on specific issues.

Without such activists there can be no progressive politics. Yet state, regional, and national networks are also required for an effective progressive politics. That is why local-based collective (and especially multi-gendered) models of black leadership are needed. These models must shun the idea of one black national leader; they also should put a premium on critical dialogue and democratic accountability in black organizations.

Work must get done. Decisions must be made. But charismatic presence is no legitimate substitute for collective responsibility. Only a charisma of humility and accountability is worthy of a leadership grounded in a genuine democratic struggle for greater freedom and equality. This indeed may be the best—and last—hope to hold back the nihilistic threat to black America. □

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Nick Salvatore

TWO TALES OF A CITY

Nineteenth-Century Black Philadelphia

During the last thirty years the perspective on the African-American urban experience has changed dramatically. Gone, to a large extent, is an interpretive model that stressed the social pathology of black life. Attributed, in its nonracist forms, to the destructive effects of slavery and postemancipation discrimination, this model emphasized the weakness of the black family and stressed the effects of a high crime rate, broad underemployment, and the effect of single-female-headed family units upon African-American familial and community life. Although important differences existed within this scholarly tradition, the premise that significant portions of the black community had, to some degree, been unable to withstand the pressures exerted by a hostile and powerful white world informed the work of such diverse scholars as W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Stanley Elkins, Kenneth B. Clark, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Amid appreciations of the complexity of African-American life, for example, DuBois wrote in his 1899 classic, *The Philadelphia Negro*, that "the great weakness of the Negro family is still the lack of respect for the marriage bond, inconsiderate entrance into it, and bad household economy and family management." Since the 1960s, however, a new vision has emerged, one that might view DuBois's perceptions as the musings of a brilliant if flawed Victorian moralist.[1]

While the best of this new work acknowledges the severe burdens imposed upon black people by white hostility, its primary message emphasizes the ability of African Americans to adapt creatively to the racist environment. African Americans were no passive ciphers to be analyzed only by examining the forces that swirl around and through the community. Rather, in slavery as after emancipation, in the nineteenth-century South as in the twentieth-century North, a rich repository of social and cultural resources nurtured black life and buoyed individuals, the extended families that sustained them, and the institutions that would buffer the community as a whole in times of stress. "Are American Negroes simply the creation of white men," Ralph Ellison asked more than forty years ago, "or have they at least helped to create themselves out of what they found around them?" Among historians, the late Herbert Gutman developed this point more vividly than most in his frequent insistence that the central issue was "the Sartre question": "The essential question for study . . . is not what has been done to men and women but what men and women do with what has been done to themselves." Earlier scholars had simply misunderstood the evidence, Gutman and others argued, a result of racist assumptions or an insensitivity to the varieties of historical evidence. If understood correctly, this evidence would reveal both the complexity of black cultural life and the functional importance of behavior patterns frequently deemed disruptive. Rather than emphasizing social pathology, most scholarship of the past thirty years has celebrated, with varying degrees of sophistication and exactitude, the cultural manifestations of peoplehood in African-American life.[2]

A number of influences contributed to this historiographical development. The civil rights movement and the resurgence of nationalist sentiment within the African-American com-

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munity had a powerful influence upon scholars, both white and black, in the reshaping of questions and the dismantling of earlier assumptions. In an ironic way this process was urged forward by the publication, in 1965, of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family*. Moynihan argued that slavery and postemancipation history resulted in a black family structure that facilitated the transmission of social pathologies. At their gentlest, the attacks on Moynihan dismissed him as one who, through historical ignorance, would blame the victim for the crime. In the wake of this reaction, a profound chill descended over much of the intellectual world that inhibited further explorations in directions held to be demeaning or racist. Separate yet simultaneous was the influence of the then "new" social history. In E. P. Thompson's avowed intent "to rescue [the common person] . . . from the enormous condescension of posterity" lay a disposition, on the part of some who followed, to celebrate uncritically the lives of those who were thus discovered. From all of this emerged a new historiography of first the slave and, in time, the free urban African American, North and South.[3]

Valuable as much of this work has been, cautions have recently been raised about these new directions. Just as the enthusiastic adoption of Thompson by his American followers has recently been questioned in the writing of working-class history, so too has the reactive nature of much research following the Moynihan debate been reevaluated. William Julius Wilson, for instance, has insisted that researchers "can no longer afford to be timid" in exploring "the relationships between joblessness and family structure, joblessness and other social dislocations (crime, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, and so on), and joblessness and social orientation among different age groups" within the contemporary African-American community. Wilson's analysis stresses unemployment as the root cause of the profound problems of "the truly disadvantaged." Yet he explicitly applauds Moynihan, Clark, Lee Rainwater, and others and does not cringe from the recognition that destructive social pathologies, whatever the cause, afflict contemporary urban ghetto life.[4] Yet, precisely because Wilson is not a historian, his analysis leaves critical points unaddressed. Wilson assumes, for example, that the crisis within the African-American community is of relatively recent vintage. Given his strong interest in public policy, this belief permits Wilson to applaud equally both Moynihan *and* Gutman but it also leaves unexamined the broader conceptual issues at stake in Gutman's radical criticism of Moynihan. In creating a kind of intellectual odd couple, Wilson skirts a historical problem of some importance.

The two books under discussion here help explore this problem. Gary B. Nash's *Forging Freedom* and Roger Lane's *The Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia* are sensitive and sophisticated in both conception and method.* Both examine African-American life in Philadelphia and, together, analyze almost two centuries of that community's history. But they do so from such profoundly different perspectives that, on first reflection, one might wonder whether in fact they studied the same city. The oddness of this juxtaposition, not unlike Wilson's, may help to reveal further areas for research and discussion.

Community Building

Nash describes his work as a study of "the dialectic between oppression and achievement, racism and race consciousness, external structures of power and internal consciousness and experience" within Philadelphia's African-American community. Over more than a century, Nash explains, Philadelphia blacks moved from slavery to freedom; exploited contradictions between the rhetoric of freedom and actual experience during the Revolutionary era; established a network of churches, benevolent organizations, and fraternal societies that gave definition to the community; and, most critically, created the nucleus of a middle class providing economic and political direction for the majority. Moreover, this community-

* Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 354 pp.; and Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1900* (Harvard University Press, 1986), 213 pp.

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building proceeded despite the constant remaking of the African-American community during these years, a result of the continued migration of blacks, free and fugitive slaves, into the city. Between 1820 and 1840 black Philadelphia grew by one-third; and, despite race riots, demands for colonization, and near daily antiblack violence, the community grew in strength as well as size. "Consequently," Nash writes, "the quarter-century after 1815 became an era of unprecedented institution building that demonstrated the resilience of those regarded increasingly by whites as incapable pariahs." Nash skillfully develops the tension between white expectations and black reality. *Forging Freedom* is intended in part as a study of leaders, "some inspired, others frail"; but it is also intended as "a reckoning of ordinary people making choices, searching for solutions to their own problems, and determining the course of their lives as best they could." There are three related concepts here that deserve notice.

The first concerns Nash's argument that the black community sought to create for itself an area of independent, even autonomous, existence. As early as 1782, when the free African-American population was still under one thousand, six of the city's free blacks petitioned to have the government recognize a section of Potters Field as a distinctly African-American burial ground. This turning of their exclusion from white church-related cemeteries into a more positive group identity, Nash argues, suggests "a rising consciousness among recent freedpersons that they were a distinct people who must work collectively to secure a place of dignity and security in white American society." Nash points to further evidence in discussing the emergence of independent black churches and in the naming pattern adopted by freed men and women that differentiated them both from the slave past and the white present. This Thompsonian argument is quite attractive and follows from Nash's explicit intent to write not only of oppression but also of "the internal history of a people striving to live life as fully, as freely, as creatively, and as spiritually rich as their inner resources and external circumstances allowed." Attractive as it is, this argument is not fully convincing. One wants to delve deeper into the tension evident between descriptions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a "fully autonomous black center of strength" and Nash's frank acknowledgment that, even before the Revolution, Philadelphia's slaves adapted "to the culture of the master class." The point becomes even sharper when, in a discussion of black religion, Nash suggests that through the African-American minister black Philadelphians "imbibed the same moral calculus that white churchgoers did." So there is an attractive but elusive argument here concerning the development of an autonomous black culture that never quite confronts its own contradictions. Assertions for autonomy recede in places, the extent of this autonomous influence across all class groupings within the black community is never clear, and the fact that the "limits of the possible" for black Philadelphians "were always dictated to some extent by the white majority around them" is never fully integrated into the larger conceptual framework.

Nash recognizes that employment constituted "the foundation of an independent existence":

> Artisan, service, and proprietorial work roles by no means guaranteed success, but enough blacks established themselves by the early nineteenth century to create the nucleus of a black middle class. Though many were frozen in unskilled jobs at the bottom of the urban workforce largely controlled by white Philadelphians, scores of free blacks created their own work roles, and thus provided themselves with decent material rewards, and equally important, space to operate autonomously. . . . Even the ragman made daily decisions with existential meaning that we can only guess at—which streets to walk, when to set out, when to quit work. Though he had to endure poverty, the ragman did not have to withstand the insulting comments of a boss, maintain a schedule set by somebody else, and face layoffs during an economic downturn.

Nash is right in identifying as centrally important the emergence of a black middle class, given its ability to provide employment to other blacks, a leadership familiar with the

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ways of the white world, and concrete support for the community's religious and fraternal institutions. But it is less clear from Nash's book how cohesive this group was and how effective it could or wished to be in addressing the needs of the entire black community. One would want to know, for example, whether the class categories referred to in this study remained firm over generations. As is well known, James Forten became an independent entrepreneur (a sail maker), employed white and black artisans, and transmitted to his children both wealth and status. But we know almost nothing about those artisans, especially the African-American ones, and their subsequent history.

This is a particularly important point for Nash's discussion in light of an 1838 report of the trades followed by black Philadelphians. Not only were they overwhelmingly in service positions that were the least remunerative and most dependent upon whites (dressmakers, hairdressers, milliners); the vast majority had achieved anything but that idealized entrepreneurial independence. Some were journeymen, working largely in small shops for others, in conditions we know little about; while most, due to racial exclusion, were unable to find work in their trade in any capacity. It remains unclear to what extent, if any, possessing a skill protected these men and women from cyclical bouts of severe under- or unemployment.[5]

The size and internal strength of this middle-class nucleus needs further examination in light of the external changes in Philadelphia as a whole. Industrialization and a dramatically increased immigration altered the social, cultural, and spatial framework of the city. If, as Nash acknowledges, the white industrial elite relied primarily on white workers, thus effectively "freezing the city's free blacks out of the emerging industrial economy," who then constituted this black middle class? Black elites were economically unable and increasingly unwilling to bear communal responsibilities, partly because they differentiated themselves from an African-American population continually remaking itself through the absorption of rural immigrants possessing few urban skills.[6] The term middle class (which might include small businesspeople, artisans, and those, whatever their level of skill, who possessed relatively steady employment) remains poorly defined in Nash's study. It is unclear whether the middle-class nucleus identified by Nash either preceded or survived the formation of industrial Philadelphia in numbers sufficient to the serious economic and cultural tasks he assigns it. Perhaps, in the context of the vicious racism of the 1830s and 1840s, the meaning attributed to the daily choices a ragman might make were to him less compelling than to later observers.

This is not to suggest that African Americans lacked social or cultural resources. It is to question whether, in the face of profound difficulties, there were enough individual and community resources in nineteenth-century Philadelphia to maintain an internal cohesiveness for the majority within the black community.

These questions come to a head in what Nash terms, alternately, "the passage," "the crucial psychological passage," or "the crucial psychological middle passage by which those who gained freedom in a legal sense procured as well the emotional autonomy that enabled them to overcome their dependence upon whites." How freed slaves become free men and women is a complex social and psychological process. Nash recognizes the continued power of the "many scars of oppression" and notes, following Edward Turner, "the course of this slow rise from complete servitude to complete freedom."[7] Central to this rise, of course, is the black church. For "ordinary men and women," he writes with passion and insight, these churches "provided the key to their individual and collective security" in that these black institutions allowed them to form "a kind of subcommunity civic existence that operated outside the formal political life of the city."

As important as the church was in helping individuals navigate that "middle passage," the extent of its influence remains unclear. There is relatively little discussion of the churches' collective ability to adopt to the constant migration, a point of some importance given the rising proportion of African Americans who were not church members.[8] Concurrent with

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the growth of the churches, moreover, Nash points to a persistent rise in the crime rate and to the emergence, by the 1820s, of a subculture among youths and recent migrants to the city. This subculture possessed "a penchant for conviviality, an unrestrained display of emotions, and a desire to present oneself as individualistically as possible, as if to obliterate the drudgery and submission required under slavery or, later, in the cities, the poverty and blasted ambitions of many free blacks."

How this subculture affected that "middle passage," related to the black church, and influenced the crime rate are points that remain unexplored. In what ways, for example, did this subculture affect the black urban family? Did its presence quicken the elite's distancing from the community? Did churches reach out to these youth or did they focus primarily on those already within the flock? Was there movement back and forth between the African-American worker, perched so precariously in the economy, and this subculture? Did it grow over time and offer, in light of the systematic exclusion from industry in all but the most menial positions, a seeming alternative culture built on conspicuous consumption and immersion, for some at least, in the world of the demimonde?

The point here is not, of course, to judge Philadelphia's nineteenth-century African-American citizens. Rather, it is to argue that the complex evidence Nash has accumulated itself demands a broader framework than he provides. His argument that the black community carved for itself an autonomous existence falters on closer examination of the economic and psychological support for that claim. Further, his recognition of crime, poverty, economic exclusion, and the subculture remains curiously unintegrated with his larger emphasis on African-American effort and ambition. It is as if a particular moral imperative drives the Thompsonian charge to study the people's culture in one direction only—while evidence that may cloud the picture remains visible but out of focus. My criticisms notwithstanding, Nash's *Forging Freedom* is a powerful and important book but not the complete story of Philadelphia's black community during these years.

Broken Apart

Roger Lane's *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia* is starkly different from *Forging Freedom*. Lane's account of the same city, which begins but two decades following the close of Nash's study, recognizes neither a dialectic between "oppression and achievement" nor the existence of an autonomous black culture. Rather, Lane portrays the African-American world of Philadelphia as fragmented, in serious internal tension, and generally far too weak to sustain a collective autonomous existence. While he acknowledges certain important contributions in recent scholarship, Lane consciously situates himself in "an old tradition going back to W.E.B. DuBois." He stresses the systematic exclusion of African Americans from the "urban-industrial revolution" and argues that "this exclusion had important effects not only on criminal behavior but also, through criminal behavior, on family life, racial leadership, and urban culture in general." The book has won prestigious awards even as it has been dismissed as a volume that teems with such "numerous distortions and inaccurate statements" that it can be considered as merely "a new restatement of an old racism."[9] Such unfounded charges are a serious obstacle to understanding the critical issues in the book.

Lane centers attention on two related issues: a rising crime rate from mid-century on and the emergence of a criminal subculture of great influence within the community. He situates this analysis within a framework that would attribute to the "urban industrial revolution" a powerful sociopsychological impetus encouraging rational and sober attitudes at odds with such criminal behavior. Lane explains this juxtaposition by noting that blacks were largely excluded from that revolution. The Philadelphia African-American community, says Lane, suffered so profoundly because of its systematic exclusion from the central economic experience of the era that its economic, social, and cultural life weakened, indeed fractured, in the process.

Examination of the city's overall crime statistics suggests to the author that a graph of the crime rate for the decades following 1860

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would resemble a "long U-curve": a downward trend in all categories lasting until approximately 1960, when the crime rate began to rise precipitously. Lane argues that the urban industrial revolution actually fostered this decline by introducing both a rising standard of living and the imperative, for workers as for others, to heed the strictures of a bureaucratic disciplinary system in school and factory as a precondition for economic advancement. Among the Irish, for example, these influences coalesced over time, and, as a broader recognition of the benefits available from industrial development grew, the Irish crime rate dropped. The Irish had had the worst rate of homicide indictments among whites in 1860 (4.7 per 100,000, where the citywide average was 2.9); by 1901, those figures had dropped dramatically (1.8, against a citywide average of 2.1 per 100,000). This change Lane attributes in large measure to "the new industrial order" that fostered among urbanites here and elsewhere "more sober and rational lives than they had earlier in the century."

But such developments were dependent upon inclusion in the economic expansion—and Philadelphia's African Americans clearly were not included. This led to destructive consequences. Black homicide indictments, already quite high in 1860 at 8.7 per 100,000, grew by century's end to 9.5 per 100,000. Other categories of crime—prostitution, gambling, robbery, and assault—increased as well. These realities are central to Lane's broader analysis. He argues that this criminal activity led to the creation of an "active criminal subculture" extending throughout the African-American community regardless of economic standing.

This subculture may have had its roots in the reality of exclusion—Lane suggests that criminal activity was a rational economic choice for many, given the absence of more attractive choices, and not simply a failure to adjust to the city. But economically, with few exceptions, these activities constituted a net transfer of wealth out of the black community. Even more searing in its effect was the social and cultural pattern this subculture encouraged. Essentially it is Lane's argument that, in its exclusion from the "urban industrial revolution," a critical segment of Philadelphia's black community was also excluded from a modern industrial consciousness, at least until more recently. Instead, this critical segment of Philadelphia blacks rejected the bourgeois values of hard work and discipline, for they understood that they would benefit little from their application. In their place developed a value system that emphasized an ostentatious individualism, conspicuous consumption, and the illicit activities supporting such a lifestyle. That the racial reality of Philadelphia's economic development allowed few other choices did not soften the profound effect such exclusion had upon the inner life of the city's black community.

Lane's argument is powerful and, in many aspects, quite compelling. His "sober and rational" view allows him to ask questions of the evidence that most social historians have passed over. *Roots of Violence* neither blames the victim nor demeans African Americans—but it does insist, in common with William Julius Wilson, that there are indeed consequences, individual and social, to such extensive patterns of discrimination. Certain questions, nonetheless, remain.

Lane's use of the term culture (or, alternatively, subculture) is highly particularistic. As he has suggested, "[A]s an historian of crime, I approach black culture from a grotesque angle, and do not pretend to describe it whole."[10] In *Roots of Violence*, however, this admonition is less than clear. It is not just that his account is unbalanced but rather that he tells us little about the interaction between the subculture of crime and other segments of the community. How churches, social and fraternal clubs, and the more informal familial neighborhood networks (especially among the newer residents) interacted with this subculture is never examined in depth.[11] Neither the black middle class nor the black elite appear in the book in substance: usually they are mentioned because of their inability to redirect that subculture or as evidence of that subculture's ability to undermine their stability. This interaction within the African-American community needs a more sustained analysis, especially if Lane's argument is to be convincing. But Lane's historical

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discussion of Philadelphia's African-American culture remains underdeveloped and driven, perhaps more than he recognizes, by a one-dimensional emphasis on criminal statistics.

The need for a more complex analysis is also evident in Lane's discussion of the black family, a matter he does explore in some detail. Lane accepts the argument, advanced by Gutman and others, that "a workable sexual morality and family life had in fact flourished in the slave South." The black family's structural divergence from the "Victorian ideal," moreover, was a positive creative adaptation to a particular set of harsh circumstances. Turning his attention to the urban family in Philadelphia, Lane argues that neither a debilitating legacy of slavery nor "female-headedness" of family units is a viable category for evaluating the stability of the black family: "permissive" sexual mores were neither indiscriminate in practice nor unique to African Americans among the world's rural people; while the prevalence of single females as heads of families was neither as widespread nor as destructive as is often assumed. How, then, to account for the dismal picture presented of the black family? Lane writes:

> The real measure [of the strength of the family] is how well parents are able to raise children, to maintain good relations within the network of kin, and to transmit useful cultural values across the generations. On this point, all of the evidence from nineteenth century Philadelphia points in one direction. The conditions of urban living were deeply subversive of black family life.

As evidence Lane points to the extent of intrafamily violence, as measured by the murder rate within families; the high incidence of delinquency among black children, as reflected in the admissions to Philadelphia's youth detention home, the House of Refuge; and the prevalence of prostitution, estimated at perhaps as much as one-eighth of the black female population in 1895. "It was impossible, then," Lane concludes, "to mount any collective resistance to a system that trapped all blacks together."

While it is refreshing to see the supposed white middle-class family structure rejected as a model, other elements of Lane's analysis remain troublesome. How, for example, did that viable southern family become the fractured urban unit of Lane's analysis? From *Roots of Violence* we know that black delinquent youth were largely Philadelphia-born, but beyond that we have little hard evidence concerning the relative importance of northern or southern origins in creating the criminal subculture; nor do we have a sense of how the African-American family may have been changed over the course of forty years. It may be, as others have suggested, that "a workable sexual morality and family life" viable for a rural world, pre- or post-Emancipation, proved to be particularly weak when transported to the city, North or South.[12] But for the argument that this "active criminal subculture" was centrally important, we need to examine the interaction between the southern migrants and the city from at least the following perspectives: the composition of the migratory pattern itself; the nature and meaning, for their urban life, of the recent migrants' continued contact with their southern "home" communities; the existence, and effectiveness in the urban context, of self-help networks of extended kin and neighbors; and the relationship between these migrants and the older, urban black residents. These questions, in turn, must be asked intergenerationally, as there is some evidence to suggest that the experience of the children of the migrants differed sharply from that of their parents.[13]

Finally, Lane's evidence for family disruption is not entirely convincing. Intrafamily violence is ugly, to be sure, but between 1860 and 1900, as the city's black population grew by more than forty thousand people, Lane found (by a generous standard) only sixty-two cases of familial homicide. While this was proportionally above the white rate, the sixty-two cases—in a population that would reach over sixty-two thousand—is hardly evidence of a fractured family structure. Similar criticism might be made of Lane's evidence on delinquency, although he is on firmer ground in his discussion of prostitution. In short, the detailed research that would link these crime statistics to, at a minimum, church and associational

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membership rolls, relief agency records, and the city's marital records is sorely lacking. Nor is it evident that such research would disprove Lane's argument: his own work has considerable strengths and it calls upon the extensive research of W.E.B. DuBois as well. But to move the discussion of African-American urban culture from an emphasis on either its social pathology or its autonomous presence to a stress on the ability of racism to overwhelm African-American collective resources demands a more sustained historical examination if it is to be more than suggestive.

Common Themes

In the tension between *Forging Freedom* and *Roots of Violence* certain themes present themselves for further research and thought. Neither volume successfully analyzes the historical roots of the African-American class structure. This is especially evident in each book's treatment of the black middling orders. While neither defines the category with clarity, their basic assumption that small shopkeepers and regularly employed workers were critical to the community's ability to withstand some of the worst shocks of racism is important. The clash between these books also raises questions concerning the role of pre-industrial cultural values in the transition to industrial capitalism. Nash notes, and then fails to explore, the significance of black exclusion from industrial life; Lane, however, is quite clear that to be excluded from that transition, despite the pains inclusion brought, is to remain in a position of profound disadvantage. The work of Lane and William Julius Wilson suggests avenues for both historical and contemporary exploration of the economic and cultural effects of this exclusion. In addition, Lane's argument has a particular implication for the writing of nineteenth-century white working-class history as well. It would lend support to the suggestions of Richard Stott and others that we need to be more rigorous in appreciating both the cultural and social values of the pre-industrial world and the specific relevance of those values to industrial society.[14]

Finally, there is the central tension between these two books, one that revolves around their respective visions of nineteenth-century African-American urban culture. While neither argument is fully convincing, the structure of Roger Lane's analysis, if not always its development, suggests an important direction for future work. Not to explore these issues historically is to continue the timidity Wilson so sharply criticized in contemporary policy debates. As in so many other areas, it was W.E.B. DuBois who pointed the way when he wrote, in 1899, that "we must study, we must investigate, we must attempt to solve; and the utmost that the world can demand is, not lack of human interest and moral conviction, but rather the heart-quality of fairness, and an earnest desire for the truth despite its possible unpleasantness."[15] □

Notes

[1] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York, 1967), p. 72. See also E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago, 1939); Stanley Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago, 1959); Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York, 1965); and U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C., 1965).

[2] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York, 1964), pp. 315–16; and Herbert G. Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York, 1987), p. 346. The literature referred to here is simply too large to note, but for an insightful analysis of twentieth-century African-American urban historiography, see Kenneth Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future* (Baton Rouge, 1986), pp. 91–122.

[3] William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 3–5; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), p. 12. For a discussion of the reaction to the Moynihan report, see Lee Rainwater and W.C. Yancey, eds., *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). Herbert G. Gutman's massive study, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976), is perhaps the most famous work of history that has its origins in the reaction to Moynihan's report.

[4] See David Brody, "The Old History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class," *Labor History*, 20: 1 (Winter 1979): 111–126; Nick Salvatore and David

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Lewin, "Notes on the Roundtable: Theories of Labor History and Industrial Relations," *Proceedings*, 38th Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association (1986), pp. 384–390; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, pp. 18–19, 73, 126–29, 149–57.

[5] See *Register of Trades of the Colored People in the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1838). Fourteen years later, a canvass of black Philadelphia suggested little change in this condition: few blacks were entrepreneurial tradesmen while nearly half were "compelled to abandon their trades on account of the unrelenting prejudice against their color." See Benjamin C. Bacon, *Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1859), p. 15.

[6] On this differentiation see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 173, 248; Emma Jones Lapansky, "Friends, Wives, and Strivings: Networks and Community Values Among Nineteenth-Century Philadelphian Afro-American Elite," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* CVIII, 1 (January 1984): 23–24; and Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787–1848* (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 151–169.

[7] Edward Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington, D.C., 1911), p. 89; see also Nash's discussion in *Forging Freedom*, p. 78.

[8] See the figures on black church membership collected by Reverend William T. Catto, *A Semi-Centenary Discourse*. (Philadelphia, 1857) and compare with Nash's estimates for twenty years earlier in *Forging Freedom*, pp. 259–60.

[9] See the letter of V.P. Franklin (with responses by Lane and Emma Jones Lapansky) in *Journal of American History*, 75: 1 (June 1988); 328.

[10] Roger Lane, "To the Editor," *Journal of American History, op. cit.*

[11] For an informative analysis of this process in Chicago, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989).

[12] Clyde Vernon Kiser, *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York, 1967), pp. 201–06; and Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston, 1865–1900* (New York, 1979), pp. 194–95.

[13] Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, p. 166.

[14] See Richard Stott, "British Immigrants and the American 'Work Ethic' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Labor History*, 26: 1 (Winter 1985): 86–102.

[15] DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, p. 3.

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CAN WE COPE WITH DRUGS?

A Few Modest Proposals

In announcing his resignation last fall as drug czar, William Bennett asserted that the nation had turned the corner in the war on drugs. President Bush concurred. "We're on the road to victory," he declared.

They may be the only two people in America who believe that. While casual drug use among the middle class is declining—a trend that began well before Bennett's term—the level of drug abuse in our inner cities remains alarmingly high. Drug-related violence continues to rage, fueling record homicide rates in cities from New York to Phoenix. Youth gangs, packing more firepower than ever, have taken over large tracts of the inner cities. And even as crack and cocaine remain widely available, smokable heroin is pouring into the country, raising the threat of a new epidemic. If this be success, may we please be spared failure.

The ineffectuality of our current strategy has fueled the search for an alternative. Can we do better in dealing with drugs in America? Yes, but only if we take a far more innovative approach. To date, most critics of current policy fall into two broad categories. One consists of those advocating legalization. Spanning the political spectrum from Milton Friedman to Ira Glasser, the legalizers maintain that decriminalizing drugs would wring the profits from the trade, thereby reducing the crime it generates. A most desirable goal, but when it comes to showing how we might actually attain it, the legalizers invariably come up short.

Consider, for instance, the scheme advanced by Richard J. Dennis in the November 1990 *Atlantic Monthly*. A wealthy Chicago industrialist and long-time Democratic fundraiser, Dennis proposes legalizing cocaine while keeping crack illegal. This, he maintains, would undercut cocaine dealers without significantly boosting crack use. "An effective dose of crack is already so cheap that price is not much of a deterrent to those who want to try it," he states. "No price reduction as a result of the legalization of cocaine, then, should lead to a significant increase in the number of crack users."

In fact, crack is not cheap. Although a vial can be had for a few dollars, the dose it contains is usually tiny, sustaining a high for no more than ten or fifteen minutes. Going on a binge can cost hundreds of dollars. If cocaine were legalized, crack would become cheaper and purer—a deadly combination that might well increase demand. All in all, legalizing cocaine while keeping crack illegal seems as practical as outlawing martinis while gin and vermouth remain legal. As long as the chance remains that legalization will lead to increased use, most Americans will be reluctant to take it. Many black leaders—fearful of the devastation legalization could wreak in their communities—oppose such a course.

If not less law enforcement, how about more? In the opposite corner from the legalizers is the law-and-order crowd. If police action has failed to stem the drug trade, they argue, we need more of it, not less. "Those who say that law enforcement has failed should remember that until the last two years it was barely tried . . .," criminologist James Q. Wilson has asserted in the *New Republic*, adding:

> The facts are these: some parts of our cities are being destroyed by gangs competing for the right

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to destroy lives by selling drugs. Those gangs have to be defeated, even if it means hiring more judges and building more correctional facilities. After that we can help communities reorganize themselves so that the good people control the streets.

You don't have to be a neoconservative like Wilson to find some appeal in this approach. Drugs have turned our streets into battle zones, and if reclaiming them requires a cop on every corner, then so be it. Unfortunately, those cities that have tried this approach have little to show for it. Washington, D.C., is a good example. The District of Columbia has more police officers per capita—eight for every one thousand citizens—than any other city in the country. (The next highest figure is 3.9 officers, in Baltimore.) In addition, some five thousand federal officers work in Washington, effectively doubling the number of police in the city.

Drawing on these resources, the District in 1986 launched an ambitious enforcement campaign called Operation Clean Sweep. Squads of police officers swooped into drug-infested neighborhoods, arresting every suspicious-looking person in sight. In two and a half years, the D.C. police arrested 47,000 people. The city's prison population swelled from 5,800 in 1984 to 8,315 in 1988. Yet the violence only escalated. Homicides, 197 in 1987, spurted to 369 in 1988. Conceding defeat, the police department let Clean Sweep lapse. "Don't give me more [police] people," Police Chief Isaac Fulwood, Jr., later told the *Washington Post*. Those who believe that arresting drug dealers can significantly reduce crime, Fulwood added, are "missing the boat."

A high-level panel on D.C. financial priorities, chaired by Alice Rivlin of the Brookings Institution, reached a similar conclusion: "Increasing the number of officers appears to relocate rather than eliminate crime. . . . High police visibility may drive off street muggers, auto thieves, or subway bandits . . . but has little or no effect on the drug-related violence that is the District's 'crime problem.' " The same pattern is evident in cities throughout the country.

With traditional police techniques failing, law-enforcement advocates are gravitating toward a new one, called community-oriented policing (COP). Unlike traditional policing, in which officers ride around in squad cars to respond to emergency calls, police in the COP system are assigned to specific neighborhoods. Walking a beat, they become acquainted with the community and the problems it faces. As residents come to trust the police, they supply information about local criminals. The police, in turn, help the community solve its problems. If trash needs collecting, officers can contact the sanitation department; if street lights are out, they can call public works. Whereas traditional policing reacts to crimes once they are committed, COP seeks to prevent crime by addressing the conditions that breed it.

Community-oriented policing is catching on in cities across the country. This fall, for instance, Mayor David Dinkins, announcing a new anticrime package for New York City, made COP its centerpiece. "Each neighborhood throughout the City will have one or more police officers assigned to it for the purpose of developing relationships with the area residents and becoming sensitive to their particular needs and problems," the mayor's plan stated. "The officers will not only fight crime in the neighborhood but will also seek to restore a sense of order in their assigned areas and to enhance the quality of life for its residents."

A laudable goal. Yet the prospects for achieving it seem dim. With police brutality a serious concern in New York and other large cities, all the talk about cooperation and sensitivity seems utopian. Even where the police do establish good relations with the community, their capacity to render assistance is limited. Yes, the police can help repair potholes and haul away trash, but what about the deeper problems facing these neighborhoods? Imagine the conversation between a community-oriented policeman and, say, a mother in a public-housing project:

OFFICER: Good afternoon, Ma'am, how are you today?

WOMAN: Well, let me tell you. The roof to my apartment is leaking, the elevators stink of urine, and the courtyard's filled with trash. My welfare money for the month's about to run out, and I don't have enough food for my little girl. My boy, meanwhile, dropped out of school earlier this

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year. He has trouble reading, and there aren't many decent jobs available anyway, so he's taken up with a gang. He comes home at all hours of the night, and I'm worried he's going to get shot. Then there's my brother, the crackhead. I'm trying to get him into a treatment program, but the nearest center is two miles away and it won't have an opening for three months. . . .

OFFICER: I'll see what I can do about that trash, Ma'am.

Police officers are trained to arrest criminals, not deal with housing problems or inadequate health care. By calling on cops to act as social workers, COP shows the extent to which government has abnegated its traditional responsibilities toward the nation's poorest citizens. In the end, COP seems another one of the fads that periodically sweep the nation's law-enforcement community, all meeting the same sad end.

Conceptually, though, COP helps point a way toward an alternative drug strategy. By recognizing that law enforcement alone cannot get the job done, that local social and economic conditions must also be addressed if crime is to be reduced, COP represents an advance in our efforts to understand the drug crisis and fashion a response to it.

The key is community. Drugs have generated the most sustained burst of community activism in America since the 1960s. From Miami to Seattle, tens of thousands of Americans have taken to the streets, seeking to win them back from the drug trade. Initially, this activism took the form of crime-patrol groups that worked with the police to push out dealers. Over time, though, these groups have evolved into highly versatile organizations concerned with basic quality-of-life issues. Taken together, these groups constitute a vibrant national network that may be able to attack the drug trade at its roots—if they receive the proper support from Washington.

So far, they haven't. Community activism, which in the 1960s was embraced by liberals, has recently been appropriated by the right; in the process, it's been thoroughly denatured. Thus, Newt Gingrich talks passionately about "empowering" the poor, by which he means cutting back the government's role in the inner city.

As drug czar, William Bennett forever touted the role of community groups in fighting drugs. He regularly crisscrossed the country, meeting with block presidents and neighborhood organizers. He issued a report, called "Fighting Back," which saluted twenty top antidrug community leaders. The National Drug Control Strategy, commonly known as the Bennett Plan, asserted that "whatever gains are made by law enforcement in diminishing local drug problems, a permanent solution requires the persistent involvement of an entire community."

But Bennett's conception of community was extremely narrow. In his view, grass-roots groups are to serve as little more than adjuncts to the police, helping to extend their ability to patrol and arrest. The more important function of these groups—addressing the conditions that give rise to crime—Bennett dismisses as irrelevant. Consider, for example, the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime in Kansas City, Missouri—one of Bennett's favorite community groups. The Bennett Plan singles it out as a "vivid example of how a well-coordinated community can take on the threat posted by neighborhood drug activity." The group's director, Alvin Brooks, was featured in Bennett's top-twenty list of drug fighters, and both Bennett and George Bush have traveled to Kansas City to see the Ad Hoc Group in action.

Since its creation in the mid-1980s, the Ad Hoc Group has set up drug hot lines, held rallies in shopping centers, and established drug-free zones around Kansas City schools. It has organized marches through crack-infested neighborhoods, directing angry chants through bullhorns at crack dealers. Working with the police, the group has succeeded in shutting down more than one hundred crack houses.

Despite it all, crack and cocaine remain widely available in Kansas City. Drug gangs continue to flourish, and shootouts remain a favorite means of settling disputes. Making more of a dent in the drug trade would require a significant expansion in the Ad Hoc Group's

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activities. "Whatever we do, we do on a shoestring," says director Brooks, a former police officer. The Ad Hoc Group has plenty of volunteers, he says, but "volunteers can do only so much." With additional funds, Brooks adds, he could hire a few full-time staff members.

He could also open a neighborhood recreation center. "Our kids have nowhere to go to swim, to sing, to dance," Brooks laments. "They have to go ten to fifteen miles to be entertained. With nothing to do, they've very vulnerable." For inner-city children to remain free of drugs, Brooks says, "they have to have the same options as their white suburban counterparts." Brooks has found a building ideally suited to his purpose but lacks the funds to buy it. When Bennett and Bush came visiting, Brooks asked for help. None was offered.

That's not surprising. In 1990, the Bush administration spent almost $11 billion on antidrug programs. Of that sum, a mere $102 million—about one percent—was earmarked for community-group efforts. In short, Brooks is one of the "thousand points of light"—volunteers working to improve their communities independently of the government. Without public support, though, these groups simply cannot get the job done; the drug trade is simply too vast and powerful. It's not large handouts they want, but modest grants for specific projects—athletic centers, job-training programs, health clinics, day-care centers, and the like.

The key, as Brooks indicates, is providing inner-city kids an alternative to the streets. With few organized activities available in downtrodden neighborhoods, black youths are easily sucked up into the drug trade. In many cities, youth gangs offer the one viable social structure. Only by setting up parallel structures can communities hope to rescue their children from the streets. Basketball leagues, dance classes, field trips—all can help set inner-city kids on a more constructive path.

According to one recent study, the presence of something so simple as a Boys' Club in a housing project can help reduce the level of drug activity there. It doesn't matter whether the club specifically offers drug-prevention programs. By its very existence, the club can spur parents to pay more attention to their kids, thus making it less likely they'll get into trouble. This is the real value of neighborhood groups: they provide a vehicle for involving inner-city residents in their communities. Only when this happens can we hope for progress in the fight against drugs.

Needless to say, vigorous law enforcement remains essential. Drug dealers have repeatedly shown their readiness to attack anyone who threatens their livelihood. Unless the police can guarantee neighborhood residents some measure of safety, many will remain reluctant to get involved. COP advocates are thus correct in pointing to the importance of improved community-police relations.

The danger lies in the Republican view of these grass-roots groups as mere appendages to the police. It's time to rescue these groups from the conservative embrace and provide them with the assistance they need to take on the drug trade. One possible approach is outlined in a recent report by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. Titled "Youth Investment and Community Reconstruction," the study summarizes the foundation's experience in working with crime-prevention groups in ten inner-city neighborhoods. "Community-based organizations *can* create effective strategies to reduce crime and drug abuse in inner cities," the report states, but only if they "reach well beyond the immediate symptoms . . . to address the deeper problems of the surrounding community, and particularly the multiple needs of disadvantaged youth."

The report recommends establishing a quasi-public Youth Investment Corporation, which, mixing public and private funds, would support youth programs and community groups throughout the country. As a start, the foundation recommends federal funding of $500 million a year, with matching funds from state and local governments. One can only hope that Bob Martinez, Bennett's nominated successor, reads this report and acts on it.

Even if such a corporation were created, though, it would represent only a start. For many poor neighborhoods have no community groups to begin with. Shattered by years of abandonment and neglect, these areas have

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experienced extreme social disintegration, making any form of collective action problematic. The nation's public-housing projects—veritable incubators of drug use—are filled with hopeless, apathetic souls whose main preoccupation is surviving from one day to the next. For the drug crisis to be contained, the residents in these frontline neighborhoods will somehow have to be mobilized.

And that could prove very costly, as shown by a recent experiment in the nation's capital. Washington has experienced a remarkable surge in grass-roots organizing in recent years, with more than sixty groups on line. But many poor neighborhoods, beaten into submission, remain immune to such activity. In an effort to change that, the District in late 1989 launched an innovative program called Reclaiming Our Streets. As a test site, the government chose Valley Green, a hardscrabble neighborhood on the city's southern flank. Anchored by a rundown housing project, Valley Green was infested with drug dealers, with shootouts an almost daily occurrence. The terrified residents—mostly single mothers on welfare—felt powerless to fight back.

In November 1989, the city sent squads of policemen into Valley Green to clear it of drug dealers. Once the neighborhood was secured, a battalion of service workers moved in. Housing inspectors evicted illegal tenants and boarded up crack houses. The National Guard towed away abandoned cars, and prison inmates carted off trash. The city sent in recreation counselors, expanded day-care facilities, and held a job fair. To help treat drug abusers, a mobile medical van was sent to the area twice a week. Finally, city officials met with project residents and encouraged them to get involved. A group began patrolling the neighborhood every evening.

The program had an immediate effect. The number of drug dealers in the area fell off; so did the level of violence. For the first time in years, housing-project residents were able to come and go without fear of being shot. Drug abuse did not disappear, of course; crack dealers, though less visible, continued to operate in the area. Nonetheless, local residents expressed support for the program, and the local government, buoyed by the results, targeted eight other neighborhoods for similar treatment.

But the program is not cheap. The price tag for Valley Green alone came to between $10 million and $15 million. Extending the program to the other target areas would cost another $70 million, city officials estimate. Last summer, District officials appealed to Congress for help, but, given the nation's financial condition, such a sum was deemed out of the question.

Even if it were available, $70 million would represent little more than a down payment on the overall sum needed to resuscitate the city's poor neighborhoods. Washington, in turn, is but one of many cities in urgent need of increased social spending. Unfortunately, the prospect of such investment is anathema to the likes of William Bennett. In one characteristically acerbic comment, delivered at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Bennett remarked how, "on the left,"

> we see whole cadres of social scientists, abetted by whole armies of social workers, who seem to take it as catechism that the problem facing us isn't drugs at all, it's poverty, or racism, or some other equally large and intractable social phenomenon. If we want to eliminate the drug problem, these people say, we must first eliminate the "root causes" of drugs, a hopelessly daunting task at which, however, they also happen to make their living.

As drug czar, Bennett worked hard to discredit the notion that drug abuse has root causes. But the issue has not gone away. With 1990 on record as America's most murderous year, addressing the problems of our inner cities seems more pressing than ever. The conservative policy of benign neglect having failed miserably, it's time for liberals to propose an alternative. Investing in the community would seem an ideal place to begin. □

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Jeremy Larner

FIGHTING THE "WAR ON DRUGS"

A Report from the Field

Sunday morning in the capital city of a midwestern state. Four people sit at a table in the corner of a deserted hotel ballroom, sipping dreadful coffee and eating scrambled eggs and sweet rolls. They are there because the SENATOR *has flown back from Washington—and his* LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT *has called a meeting of the committee of local consultants hired to work out a drug program that would attract national attention and help the Senator raise money in other states. At the table are the state* COMMISSIONER *of education, a black Ph.D., a political veteran with few illusions; the* LIBERAL MANAGER, *a woman who heads a local health organization called the Coalition of Urban Neighborhoods; and a* HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER *in beard, tie, and Italian suit, who was a roving Maoist in the sixties but has since become a successful television producer and film consultant to the Senator.*

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: The Senator won't be here this morning. But he asked me to convey to you how important your report is. He planned to study it on the flight back and release it in two weeks at our press conference with re-habbed addicts.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: I must say, we got a great group of ex-addicts. Perfect.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Let's review where we're at. In addition to his sponsorship of the mobile clinic, the Senator has taken a strong stance on death to dealers. That's his heartfelt feeling, by the way, and the public response has been terrific. It seems the appeal of death cuts across all classes. People don't like feeling helpless. That's why we've gathered this blue-ribbon panel to bring back to Washington the first People's Plan to end drug abuse. And now you tell me the plan doesn't exist.

COMMISSIONER: We find we don't agree. We hoped the Senator could give us some guidelines.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: What happened to the seed money?

COMMISSIONER: Are you implying we kept it for ourselves?

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: *I* did.

LIBERAL MANAGER: The funding went to research in the field. We've gathered an enormous amount of data. We just can't get together on the answers.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Let's take this in sequence. The Senator wants to open with a definitive statement on the "why" of this drug blight. None of this "just say no" stuff—why do people say yes in the first place?

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: For the same reason they always have, in every class and culture going back before people wrote history. In this country, thousands of patent medicines contained opium derivatives up till World War I. The original Coca-Cola contained a tiny dose of cocaine. Use of drugs takes up the slack between social pressures and an individual's desire for release.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: That doesn't explain ten-year-old drug runners, billions of profit to gangsters, assault, theft, and drive-by shooting.

COMMISSIONER: Oh, I think it does. Of course you're referring to hard drug use among the lower classes, not fraternity kids, housewives, or executives. But in the core urban areas, the so-called "social pressures" are very obvious. Not much has changed since the Kerner Commission Report in 1968, which said we have two nations in this country—rich and poor, white and black. If you don't see a role for yourself in the dominant culture, you can always sell or use drugs.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: We have to lay out steps we can take to motivate people, bring them into the mainstream. Every time he comes here, the Senator appears at schools and centers . . .

LIBERAL MANAGER: Pep talks don't stop drug use; centers and programs do—and every one of them costs money. We put money into the dealers'

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pockets every time we close a health facility—or even when we outlaw advice on birth control.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: The Senator wants to avoid related issues—they erode his base. There's a question of law enforcement here, and a question of teaching moral values. How about education?

COMMISSIONER: Every kid hears in school that crack and smack and so on can ruin your life. Some believe it, some don't. Meanwhile we have 42 pupils to a class, and we pay teachers less than janitors. We have educational conferences where governors "set standards." But to eliminate drugs, we'd have to create schools that would make up for the rest of society—and even that would be ineffective unless graduates had access to good jobs.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: I mean drug education. Surely we don't have to overhaul the entire school system just to convey the danger of drugs.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Hey, Larry, they know it already—from watching the tube. They get the message as soon as they can talk. By the time they hear it in school, it bores them.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Well then, why doesn't television work? Maybe we should come down hard on the media? That's always a winner.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Television does work. We're teaching the lessons we're paid to teach, and we're paid a helluva lot more than teachers. If you buy the right things, your life is a fantasy trip. Oh, what you do for me, Toyota! Get the right sneakers, you fly. Something bothering you, take a pill. Something still bothering you, you didn't take the right pill. Success is looking cool on TV.

COMMISSIONER: For the urban black kid, this is a devastating fiction. How do you make connections with the world if you're not a star athlete or entertainer? The easiest connection is on the corner.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Still, there's a lot of black stars now, and black rap groups get tremendous exposure on cable TV. A lot of white kids want their own version of the same experience. I don't think heavy metal is more ennobling or enabling than rap. Believe me, we have hard drug use in every neighborhood. Families fall apart everywhere, and a lot of individuals fall through the cracks.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Naturally. You're referring now to the nature of America. There's a big distribution system waiting to pounce on marginal styles and merchandise them. I learned that in the sixties. We wanted radical change and we got products for radical "life-styles." Ideas, too, get turned into so many packages. The figure of the rebel, for example, has no political content, no commitments. You can buy the motorcycle image, the surfboard image, the skinhead image—wear them every day or put them in the closet for Saturday night.

In a way, this is good, because it allows for individual mobility. I call it "the democratization of the hipster." And let's face it, drugs are democratic. Different strokes for different folks! And don't doubt it, people do all kinds of drugs without addiction, even hard drugs—to say nothing of grass—which I find indispensable for sex with someone I hardly know; tranquilizers—which I wouldn't step on a plane without; and lithium or antidepressants—used by many of the most famous maniacs in show business—and they work, too!

LIBERAL MANAGER: With side effects!

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Hey, aspirin makes your stomach bleed. Antihistamines dry out the prostate. The American Way is full of risks. The payback is, we get to choose.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Well, if you believe in choice, why not make drugs legal? We could show the way right here in this state. Let people choose—at least have a minimal ration—then they could function without the agony of withdrawal or the threat of overdose. We eliminate the necessity to steal. And cut out the profit for dealers. There are no more law enforcement costs and we even take in tax revenues, as we do with liquor.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: When you say drugs, do you mean all drugs—including, say, LSD, steroids, prescription painkillers? If not, you remain in a position of limiting drugs to protect people from themselves. Rationing, by the way, implies the same idea. The whole point of illegal drugs is to overturn rationing. It won't work, and if you try to make it work, you're into enforcement again.

COMMISSIONER: If you've been in the street for awhile, you've got to agree. Methadone, for example, is used at clinics because it blocks the effects of heroin without producing the same kind of high. But people who are maintained on Methadone are addicted, and some want more than their allowance. So Methadone is sold on the black market, even though it's not euphoric for most people—you can imagine how many more people would try to buy extra cocaine or heroin to get really high. The illegal traffic would be larger than ever. There would be more assault and robbery, not less.

LIBERAL MANAGER: You don't know that, Arthur. No one can know that. And I see our friend Herb doesn't really trust people to make choices.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: I believe in a marketplace of maximum choice. I'd rather take those risks. But no, I don't especially trust people in

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general to make good choices. Otherwise what are we talking about today?

COMMISSIONER: Hard drugs take choice away. But I disagree that rich people take the same risks. A rich person won't likely end up in the street. He'll go to a clinic, or obtain a regular prescription. And why is it an African-American mayor gets hunted down and trapped for use of cocaine, when I know five senators who use it? And a white president can conspire with a white attorney general and a marine colonel to break the law and ignore the Constitution, lie about it, and have the newspapers afraid to call him a liar? You can get away with a lot worse things than drugs in this society.

LIBERAL MANAGER: But drugs will change your personality, break up your marriage, alienate your children. That's why so many alcoholics turn to Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. works, by the way, and it doesn't cost anything except the rental of a meeting place. The senator could help us simply by coming out for more drug programs based on the twelve-step program.

COMMISSIONER: It's happening—but the lower you get on the social scale, the less chance you have of getting people to meetings.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Sorry, I disagree about A.A. I see it as another choice people make, like having two martinis before dinner every night. In the case of A.A., people choose to join a religious group. We don't have an official religion in this country, so people are always latching on to far-out substitutes. You pay a big price identifying yourself as an out-of-control addict. You go to meetings for the rest of your life, and you define yourself in the terminology of a group doctrine.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Oh, that's silly. There's no one with less individuality than a drunk. When people "recognize a higher power" in A.A., they're paying tribute to forces greater than themselves. Some of them don't even use the word God. But they start making distinctions about what they can or can't control, rather than respond to everything by getting drunk. There's even a new group for alcoholics who are atheists and agnostics.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Sorry, Ellen, it's still religious; you still have to submit to the group in exchange for what they call fellowship.

COMMISSIONER: What's wrong with fellowship? Better than dog-eat-dog greed.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: There must be some other alternative.

COMMISSIONER: If you're lucky. But most alcoholics by nature are addicts. There's a genetic factor, shared for instance by a great number of American Indians.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Native Americans.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Why is it the genetic factor is practically an article of faith in A.A.? Don't some alcoholics get that way by the same process that people get hooked on other drugs? The genetic factor is the A.A. equivalent of Original Sin.

And if you don't believe twelve-step programs are religions, just flick on the PBS channel and watch John Bradshaw or some other twelve-step preacher rant at his audience like an evangelical, with an answer to every human problem, and an insistence that God created man in the model of addiction.

COMMISSIONER: My friend, you are insensitive to human pain. There are thousands of people in this city who would be dead or in the gutter without A.A. or the drug groups based on it. For them, its a necessity.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: For some people, priests are a necessity.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Wait a minute, the Senator is pro-priest. He's pro-aid to Catholic schools, pro-God in the Pledge of Allegiance, and he is not about to say that religion is an addiction.

LIBERAL MANAGER: But isn't addiction a pretty good working model for how people harm themselves? My little sister lived a life of pure chaos till she jointed a group of recovering sex addicts.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Why couldn't she just enjoy sex when she wanted to?

LIBERAL MANAGER: Why, Herb? Why did your uncle fall in front of the subway train loaded on barbiturates? I don't know why. I can't answer the senator's question. All I know is that addiction groups help. Maybe all of us are addicts in some way. Some people are addicted to fighting and war. Some people are addicted to video games, or watching TV.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: What's wrong with that?

LIBERAL MANAGER: It stunts your precious sense of individuality.

COMMISSIONER: But if all habits are addiction, the word means nothing. I don't find addiction a useful metaphor. To watch TV or have sex every night is not necessarily bad. My experience as a teacher tells me that a lot of children are beaten down, verbally as well as physically, punish themselves as adults, and believe all kinds of things about how weak they are and what they need. I don't judge them—sit in on one A.A. meeting and you'll see how severely they judge themselves. They are trying to replace bad habits with good ones, and

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they're very frightened that all habits may be bad, and they need fellowship, as we all do.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: This is driving me nuts. What have we got here that the Senator can use? Look. He has a chance to cosponsor a bill to double crop substitution in Columbia and Peru. Why not stop cocaine at its source?

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: You'd have to put up a lot more cash than double.

COMMISSIONER: And you still wouldn't stop it. Even if we sent the military and occupied those countries--which we couldn't—the coca plant would be grown elsewhere. They only thing we can do is take away the market.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: The Senator has stated we could do that by sending all users straight to prison.

COMMISSIONER: What prisons, where? We already have twice the jail population we had ten years ago. We've locked away three times as many black people per thousand as South Africa. And what they learn in prison makes them more hardened criminals. Prisons may be our only effective schools.

LIBERAL MANAGER: And all these violent drug dealers and users can so easily get hold of guns. Why can't we take away at least their assault rifles? Why does America have to have ten times the shooting death rate that other Western countries have?

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: The Senator is a liberal, but he has his qualms about taking away the right to bear arms.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Does he really *believe* that crap?

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Let's put it this way. If he said otherwise, he'd be replaced by someone who *does* believe it.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Then what difference does it make?

Unseen by anyone, the Senator has entered. He wobbles majestically forward.

SENATOR: I'll tell you what difference it makes! I'm the Senator for children, and I've introduced landmark legislation defining standards for the healthy child. I'm the Senator for the environment; I initiated the whole concept of industrial pollution credits. And if you think the Senate is easy these days, or if a liberal Democrat gets the benefit of party leadership. . . . Pour me some coffee, Larry, I've got a killer of a headache.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: Senator, I believe you're seriously hung over.

SENATOR: I believe you're right.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: You see, here's a fine example of an individual not advocating alcohol or embracing alcoholism, but merely using it to cope.

SENATOR: Damn right I use it to cope. How the hell else could I come back here Thursday through Monday twice a month, talk to ten coffee klatches, visit six clinics, give three speeches, sit through two fund-raising dinners, have private meetings with people who want to bully me, and stand on freezing train platforms shaking hands with commuters! When I'm in my home state, I'm better off drunk at night. Now where the hell is my Drug Plan?

COMMISSIONER: Jimmy, there's no such thing as a Drug Plan. Drugs don't lead to social breakdown, it's the other way round. We've got to give people more ways of respecting themselves and doing useful work. We've got to train and re-train our work force. We've got to make a commitment to jobs, health, housing, and education. The cliché is that it's been tried, but it hasn't.

SENATOR: Arthur, you've been saying that same thing for twenty years.

COMMISSIONER: Longer.

SENATOR: Last time I heard it was when we were thinking there'd be a peace dividend.

COMMISSIONER: There's no connection. This is productive investment I'm talking about.

SENATOR: Too bad you're the only one talking about it. Trouble is, the American people have a belief that, alone among nations, we should pay no taxes.

HIPPIE PHILOSOPHER: That's what I mean by American religion.

SENATOR: Well, Ronald Reagan always said that God created America with a special blessing and destiny.

LIBERAL MANAGER: Is God responsible for all this greed and ignorance?

SENATOR: Okay, here it is. I'm going with a beefed-up federal police force and doubling the border patrol. It won't help, but it won't hurt, either, and it will toss old Arthur some job-creation.

LIBERAL MANAGER: I bet they'll take the funds from Medicare and schools.

SENATOR: That's what I'm paid to do . . .

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT: Make the tough calls.

The phone rings. The Senator turns his back to confer with an S&L executive, as his Assistant listens carefully on the extension. The committee adjourns in time to go home and watch the Super Bowl. □

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Todd Gitlin

ON THRILLS AND KILLS

Sadomasochism in the Movies

Movies have become machines for the sadomasochistic imagination. *Die Hard 2* is said to depict 264 killings. But so-called serious cinema has also been skidding down a slippery slope, aiming to meet schlock halfway. Since *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *The Godfather* (1972), scarcely a would-be serious American film is complete without hitherto unphotographed representations of the untimely release of blood from the human body—witness Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas*, with its ice pick in the back of the head, its bathroom floor flowing with blood. And make no mistake: media violence thrives on the demand as well as the supply side. Teenagers, the major audience for American movies, lap—and camp—it up. Four films produced by one man (*Die Hard 1 and 2, Lethal Weapon 1* and *2*) are said to have grossed about $1 billion. And movies are not alone in their delectation of ingenious ways to blow people apart. Heavy metal and rap sound vicious notes. Newspapers, local television news and syndicated crime shows, music videos, popular fiction—all fill with gore. The chain saw that was a mark of kitsch in the splatter movies of the seventies has become a staple of genre fiction, culminating in the grotesque depictions of the ripping and rending of flesh reported in Bret Easton Ellis's instantly notorious *American Psycho*. For what cause does all the blood flow? Where does it flow from, where does it flow to? What does the spillage say about, and to, our culture?

No single explanation will do, since the blood is spilling from so many quarters and in so many spirits—in so many different veins, one wants to say. The explanation has to be multiple, has to take some account of history. For we are not the first moderns to be variously thrilled, enthralled, disquieted, obsessed, and disgusted by violence in the media. Since before the time of Jack the Ripper in 1888, the tabloid press—and sometimes its rich relations—has battened on crime waves, the gorier the better; and for at least that long, right-thinking middle-class uplifters have censured the image-mongers for befouling or inciting working-class youth. In a study of the Ripper phenomenon, the cultural historian Christopher Frayling tells us that the murders had the unique effect of making headlines in both the *Times* and the penny comic weekly *Illustrated Police News*. While most London papers at the time restrained themselves from publishing all the gory details of stab wounds and mutilations, the *Police News* regaled its readers with elaborate accounts, complete with artists' renditions—compiling a total of 184 cover pictures during the four years after the last murder. Lurid pictures, along with illustrations from penny-dreadful novels, were commonly plastered on billboards all over town. The high-minded were quick to link the Ripper crimes to the excesses of popular culture. *Punch* asked:

> Is it not within the bounds of probability that to the highly-coloured pictorial advertisements to be seen on almost all the hoardings [billboards] in London, vividly representing sensational scenes of murder exhibited as "the great attractions" of certain dramas, the public may be to a certain extent indebted for the horrible crimes [Jack the Ripper's] in Whitechapel? We say it most seriously—imagine the effect of gigantic pictures of violence and assassination by knife and pistol

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on the morbid imagination of an unbalanced mind.

So neither the phenomenon nor the alarm is exactly new—which is not to say that the alarm of the high-minded is automatically unwarranted, that the garish splitting of skulls or slashing of flesh in the movies is good for the soul, or that the new technologies for the rendition of violence are of no moment. Rather, the ample historical precedents for today's splatter chic suggest that we are in the midst of a deep cultural presence, a hollow in the heart of modernity. The question is, Why?

Begin with the true commonplace that American culture as a whole—the culture lived on the street as well as the products of movies, television, comics, popular fiction, music, and so on—cultivates a taste for violence, an accommodation to it, an obsession with it, a series of ironic comments upon it, even (in the light of the flesh-and-blood violence of the off-screen world) a refuge from it. The nerve endings twitch from the violence of everyday life; the streets and the media serve as its conduits. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, following Baudelaire, the abrupt tactile movements that move us through traffic, carry us through crowds, call us to telephones, along with the optical switches that flicker on and off, nervously diverting attention from one sign or advertisement or information blip to another—all the definitive fits and starts of modern life produce the experience of one shock after another. We live by interruption. The paradox is that the steady shocks of living acclimate the nervous system to disruption—and produce a need for stimulus. Stimulus is relief but compounds the problem; the junkie of shock finds himself or herself (but mostly himself, as I shall argue below) in need of higher doses, faster relief.

If this is the normal experience of modern life, then we could extend Walter Benjamin to say that America's modernity embodies shock to a still higher power. Even in more prosperous times, everyday experience is full of that contradiction in terms, routine shock—in the street, people suddenly rear up out of the corner of your eye; strangers cross your path more often in a day than in many a preindustrial lifetime; sirens and screaming headlines add to the experience of everyday violation. Add to this the fact that urban life in America has become steadily more shocking as poverty spreads and atolls of urban calm have been flooded. If we do not directly experience crime on the streets or in the subways, we know someone who has, or we see and hear reports in the news. Most Americans, in the course of a day, see homeless people—evidence that life is disruptable to a degree that our pieties belie. The violence that runs rife through popular culture represents not only the rupture of life and limb but shock made routine.

But the sheer everyday shock and real-world violence that riddle our time cannot, all by themselves, account for the violence of popular culture today, for modernity is always with us but violent images are not—at least not in such vividness and profusion. *Today's movies are far more violent than the streets.* If violence in popular culture were nothing more than a mirror for the violence of the world, it would have peaked during World War II. Flesh-and-blood violence happens all over the world, but popular culture is not a carbon copy of real rat-a-tat-tat. No, there have to be more specific causes. I propose these: Set in a bad time, the industry is also in the grip of inner forces—call them, in sum, a cynicism so deep as to defy parody. The movies are driven by economic and technological incentives to revel in the means to inflict pain, to maim, disfigure, shatter the human image. And they are also beset by a zeitgeist that slashes and burns, that wants to hurt—in every sense: to reach out to cut someone; to cause pain; to fight back; to suffer; and also to be anesthetized, to feel no pain. Wounded masculinity is screaming, and what it screams ends up in grotesque pictures and Dolby sound.

Since the 1950s, when the movie audience hemorrhaged and grown-ups started to stay home, Hollywood has been hard-pressed to offer audiences something that television cannot. Teenagers became the choice big-screen audience. Box office results convinced distributors that audiences attuned to hundreds or thousands of hours of cop shows and action

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adventures by the time they get to movie-going age want to see something that simultaneously is television, with its reductions and violence, and isn't, because television is toned down for home consumption. One easy resort is to the ingenious representation of maimed and disfigured body parts, which play unforgettably on the big screen. In turn, as movie violence grows more graphic, so do even the edited-for-television versions, as well as network series, both competing with videocassettes and unedited cable replays, all adding to the pressure on the next round of movies to establish that they can offer something network television cannot—by raising their gore quotients. The unprecedented violence wrought in Arthur Penn's 1967 *Bonnie and Clyde* punctured numbness; it did, as Pauline Kael wrote at the time, "put the sting back in death." But over the years of chain saws, sharks, abdomen-ripping aliens, and the like, movie violence has come to require, and train, numbness. Anesthesia becomes necessary equipment for steering through the thousands of limb tearings and arterial spurts that the movies have made more common than dependent clauses. To be hip is to be inured, and more—to require a steadily increasing boost in the size of the dose required.

Steve Mills, a CBS executive in charge of the network's television movies, once told me that a particular movie was praiseworthy because it "has great jeopardy," meaning two elements: mechanically contrived suspense and the promise of bodily harm. The plot becomes a hammock slung from menace to menace. Action movies and real-life cartoons like the Rambo, *Star Wars*, and Indiana Jones serials account for a disproportionate share of movie profits by taking bankable stars and plunking them down in "great jeopardy." Of course, television did not invent cliffhangers; movie serials thrived on them decades ago. But commercial television made them routine; dramatic structure was bent to keep the audience hooked through the commercial breaks. Steven Spielberg, who started out as a director of television episodes, has built his career precisely on setting up "great jeopardy," but he is simply the most successful of the movie directors whose sensibility has been formed by, and aims to exploit, the expectations aroused by television. Like the clockwork violence of present-day children's television cartoons, the cliffhanger moment substitutes for character. Writers learn to sprinkle "great jeopardy" into the action to paper over vast holes in the narrative. Mangled flesh rescues a mangled plot. The severed limb compensates for a severed continuity. Witness the amazing careers of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, actors whose personae are possessed of as much talent as chain saws, and whose on-screen functions are similar.

The predilections of financiers, directors, writers, makeup artists, and audiences come together to ratchet the frequency and magnitude of violence upward. Directors draw craft pride from their ability to surpass the previous round of abominations. Financiers see no reason to temper the cycle and every reason not to; studio bosses, bankers, and distributors conclude that, but for a few romances and exercises in the supernatural, nothing is more riveting than the furies of jeopardy, frights, wounds, machine-gun bursts and fireballs, exploding helicopters, car chases, and crashes—and no motivation more alluring than revenge, power-lust, or all-around viciousness. Encouraged by the industry, young screenwriters learn to write this way—using violence as an easy and formulaic expression of the unexpected, even as punctuation. (Raymond Chandler once advised mystery writers, probably tongue-in-cheek, that when stuck they should every so often have a man come through a door with a gun; but today's ritual murders are not what he meant.) The truncated sense of what constitutes a commercial movie is coarsened further by all the garish "advances" in makeup and stunts, the better to assault the imagination with picturesquely wounded or bared flesh that (at this writing) the networks will not permit on their airwaves—all the dirty words, shark gouges, axe gashes, dentists' drills, and machine-gun spatters that end up dotted throughout even the most modest thriller. And then, not least, it remains true that, thanks heavily to television, the movie audience remains disproportionately young, and flocks to these movies. Much of the planet does likewise—exports deliver a hefty proportion of

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total box office receipts—making Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Charles Bronson & Co. global heroes.

The movie industry's dynamics, economic and technological forces—all are real pressures, all define the channels along which the slashes and gouges move into the collective imagery. But if we stop here, we are missing the heartless heart of the matter. What is this murderous stuff that flows down the channels, where does it derive its energy, what is its power? Writers write and directors direct to order in the culture industry, yes, but how do we take the measure of the immense, even self-caricatured rage they deliver? From where does this ferocious energy come, this positive relish for soul murder? Why does not only Hollywood but the creative writing workshops fill with aspiring writer-slashers?

Or specifically, writer-slashers who are men? But to ask the question this way begins the answer. The rage and nihilism that well up on the screen record the rage and nihilism of their makers. The imagination of slashing is a man's gambit. Screen murders are disproportionately murders by men. I don't know how many victims of these imagined men are women (and I don't intend to find out the painful way), but from what I read the ratio must be high. What is spilling all over the screen is the fury of men who hate and fear women, hate and fear homosexuals, and don't know just what kind of masculine performance is required of them. They want to strike back, to carve their initials into the world, and so they spawn cartoon killers—body-building men who resent the feminine and dependent in themselves and aspire to the independence of machines; demented men, whose tools for cutting the indestructible cord or denying their own castration are the knife and the chain saw; insulted and injured men, denied by women on whom they depend and who seem to demand everything of them yet don't understand what they need or won't deliver it; inarticulate men, in the line of Rambo, who know themselves through their enemies; vengeful men, in the line of Al Pacino's Michael Corleone, who discover that ruthless violence is the dark elixir that jolts boys into manhood. These men lash out and kill—it is, finally, their form of speech, it is all they know how to do. They murder vulnerability because it unmans them. They say to the weak: You'll pay, sucker. The multi-murderous film must be, in part, the underside of the continuing backlash against uppity women and weak ("feminine") men—the unconscious or semiconscious or, who knows, at times fully conscious slashing out for a way to make a place in the world, a way to be or become or remain a man.

To some unknowable degree these films must collect, contain, focus, channel, reflect back the free-floating anxieties of their spectators. Note: I am not saying that the men and boys in the audience take movie violence at face value. Many spectators shrug it off or camp it up, recognizing that movie violence is a sort of exclamation point. Teenagers gather in the dark to whoop it up, proving that they don't take the ritual murders seriously—and proving in the process that they are man enough not to have to take them seriously. Recognizing the formula, the knowing spectator settles down in the dark with his shield up. Cynicism becomes the wise response, as in, "It's only a movie." The wise guy substitutes for the wise man. The more practiced the cynicism, the more gore it takes to get a rise—or even a laugh—out of the jaded spectators. The culture piles up with victims.

The secret of the box-office success of these films is that they evoke a forbidden pleasure in the victim's pain. There is a delirium of delight in the perpetrator's ability to get away with murder. The sheer volume and magnitude of mayhem is utterly severed from the conceivably rational objectives of criminals. The viewer who doesn't close his eyes is not drawn to identify with the victims—they are barely on the screen long enough to warrant second thoughts. The visitor from another planet, screening all the splatters and slashes, would have to conclude that in the United States of America today, life is cheap. □

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Tamar Jacoby

THINKING ABOUT THE HOMELESS

Clashing Liberal and Conservative Views

They seemed at first like an apt symbol: a tragic embodiment of all that needed fixing in America. Dirt poor, out of work, without a safety net, the pitiful army of the "homeless" pricked the country's conscience. Like blacks in the sixties and Okies before that, the homeless reminded us of the still yawning gap between our lives and our ideals. This uncomfortable symbolism had a special power in the self-indulgent eighties. Indeed, it seemed to many, the misery of homelessness was the other side of the eighties: the inevitable underside of heartless, unregulated Reaganism. New York City advocate for the homeless Robert Hayes stated the argument: "The homeless are indeed the most egregious symbol of a cruel economy, an unresponsive government, a festering value system."

The American public responded with concern, even generosity. Shelters and soup kitchens sprang up in the cities, the overwhelming majority paid for by churches and other private groups. (In 1988 the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) counted 5,400 shelters nationwide.) Federal, state, and local governments contributed about a billion dollars for shelters; since 1987, Congress has authorized between $400 million and $1 billion a year to cover both this temporary housing and services like job training and drug counseling. In 1989 some 70 percent of those answering a Gallup poll said they wanted the government to step up its efforts. But recent signs—including a study released in December by the U.S. Conference of Mayors—suggest this sympathy may be waning.

The public is growing increasingly skeptical that we know how to help the homeless. By now, most Americans are aware that the symbolism evoked by Hayes and others masks a more complicated reality. After more than a decade with the problem, we still have no idea how many homeless there are, where they come from, what is wrong with them, whether their number is growing—even whether some of them want help or not.

Bitter ideological disputes have developed around these questions. Advocates for the homeless—generally liberals—assert that there are as many as two to three million homeless people. Conservatives, keen to refute any symbolic indictment of the society, argue that there may be no more than 200,000. A widely used estimate by the Urban Institute suggests the figure of 600,000.

Even more hotly contested than the numbers is the question: who are these people? To give the symbolic argument its full force, they *should* be ordinary middle- and working-class families—preferably white—reduced to poverty during the Reagan years. In fact, even liberal advocates have trouble finding many homeless like that. Left and right agree that the homeless are disproportionately male and minority. They are mainly young adults, and those designated as families tend to be single mothers from the underclass. Here agreement ends, giving way to endless debate about precisely what proportion are families (one-quarter or half), what proportion single men (45 to 80 percent), how many are substance abusers (one-third, one-half, and two-thirds are among the estimates) and how many are mentally ill (figures range from 15 to 95 percent). Those who blame the problem on

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Reaganism focus on the families, veterans, children, and formerly employed. Conservative experts emphasize mental illness and pathology.

There will be no definitive resolution of this quarrel until we have better evidence from the streets and shelters. Yet, for all the appeal of the liberal view, conservatives argue persuasively for some skepticism. There is little dispute that the Reagan era brought a shrinkage of welfare benefits and low-income housing. At a time of widespread gentrification and tight-fisted federal housing policy, as many as one million units were destroyed in single-room-occupancy hotels alone. Yet, as skeptical researchers point out, cities with tightening housing markets are not necessarily those with the biggest homeless problems. Unemployment *is* rising—and is pervasive among the homeless—but it's far from clear that many homeless actually go out to look for work. Nor is it clear that many apply for welfare benefits. Although the liberal argument makes intuitive sense, the problem of homelessness may well go deeper than anything wrought by the Reagan White House.

An emerging consensus holds that at least one-third of the homeless suffer from serious mental illness. (Some researchers say that a third have spent time in psychiatric hospitals.) Journalists tell of still more widespread personality disorders; quite apart from the schizophrenia and depression that qualify as "major mental illness," large numbers of homeless seem unable to deal with routine living. One survey, by clinicians from Johns Hopkins University, estimates that among those who are single 72 percent of the men and 95 percent of the women suffer from some kind of mental disorder (about half from phobias and other anxieties that don't classify as major illness). At least one-third to one-half abuse illegal drugs and alcohol. The Urban Institute believes that as many as one in four have criminal records; HUD says that 21 percent are victims of domestic violence.

Even those from the subgroups thought to be the sanest—the veterans and families (that is, single mothers)—often seem traumatized. As many as 70 percent of these women, according to one Harvard study, have proved unable to hold jobs or form relationships with other adults. They are the kinds of people who suffer most when poverty rises, and they cannot have prospered in the Reagan era. Still, it is surely inaccurate—and misleading for policymakers—to argue that these people's plight is caused primarily by either a lack of money or a lack of housing. The liberal advocates are not wrong to say that this population needs society's help, but it does no good to misrepresent the nature of their problems.

Let us assume, then, that they are largely troubled people who would have difficulty functioning even in the best of times. Experts who believe this to be true divide further into two groups. Those who take the broader view argue that what we call homelessness is essentially an underclass problem. Professor Peter Salins of Hunter College is among those who make this argument, though he does not use the term "underclass." For him, the cause of homelessness is "dysfunctional behavior"—addiction, chronic joblessness, detachment from friends and family. And he sees this behavior as a product of what's happening in the ghetto: the drug culture, the breakdown of the black family, the way so many minority men now spend their youth in prison instead of high school. Crack, family violence, pervasive and senseless crime: these pathologies distort countless ghetto lives to one degree or other. The homeless are simply those who have been hit the hardest. Call them the lowest of the underclass, or those who have fallen out of it.

The other group of experts who trace homelessness to pathology sees it more narrowly as a mental-health issue, concerning themselves only with those who suffer from "serious mental illness." Whether a third or half of the homeless, these are the people with the most easily identifiable problem, and there is little disputing why they are on the street. That, perhaps, is why so much of the debate about homelessness has come to focus on the rather obscure issue of "deinstitutionalization"—the wholesale emptying of large state mental hospitals that began in the sixties and continued through the seventies. This is a less sexy political question than poverty or the

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underclass or government social policy. Yet, as one of the few clear causes of homelessness, it too has become a hotly contested issue.

Two new books on deinstitutionalization reveal how far this debate has gone. One, by sociologist Rael Jean Isaac and editor Virginia Armat, comes out of the neoconservative camp; the other, by mental-health worker Ann Braden Johnson, rests on traditional liberal assumptions about homelessness and psychiatry.* The two works differ on a wide range of issues, but even more fascinating is what they agree upon.

For one thing, both concur that the old state mental hospitals were unspeakable places—huge, poorly run custodial warehouses where most patients were left to rot. Isaac and Armat, whose politics predispose them to dislike deinstitutionalization and call for rehospitalizing the psychotic homeless, are ironically the most vivid on this point. Their book paints a horrifying portrait of medieval-type wards filled beyond capacity with naked, screaming patients. On this issue, then, the liberals were right—patients had to be rescued from those old-style loony bins—and Isaac and Armat are to be credited for their honesty in admitting so.

Both sides also agree that deinstitutionalization has been an utter failure. In theory—theory written into federal law in 1963—the old state hospitals were to be slowly replaced by smaller, more humane, and treatment-oriented "community mental health centers." Some of these centers were meant to include residential care, but many were intended merely as outpatient clinics. With their symptoms calmed by Thorazine and other drugs, patients were expected to live "in the community," where the habits of normal life and productive work would eventually restore them to something like sanity. Things didn't work out that way, and many, if not most, of those patients ended up roaming the streets, muttering to themselves, and foraging in trash cans.

Unlike a few years ago, even the liberal Johnson can now acknowledge this. Of course, she also blames the homeless problem on housing scarcity and welfare cutbacks. But as someone who was working in the mental health system at the time, she knows what passed for deinstitutionalization. She watched patients who were "openly hallucinating and bristling with hostility" leaving hospitals without anywhere to go. She also saw patients discharged to homeless shelters or addresses that were empty lots.

The two books differ somewhat in exactly whom they blame for the failure of deinstitutionalization, but even here there is considerable overlap. Both note the role played by the countercultural ideas of the sixties. Among the most important—as propounded by R.D. Laing, Michel Foucault, and Thomas Szasz—were the claims that there is no such thing as mental illness, that hospitals actually cause disorders, that all patients really need is to be liberated. As one Szasz follower wrote in the early seventies: "Our use of the adjective 'sick' for such people shows only our own arrogance in believing the mainstream as we define it is 'well.' " The folly of such ideas hardly seems to need comment today, though unfortunately neither of these books can quite leave it at that. Isaac and Armat abhor all counterculturalism, and they often sound painfully shrill as they rail at the left-leaning lawyers who took the cause of patient liberation to court. Johnson is still quite taken with the libertarian ideals of the sixties: she believes deinstitutionalization was a good idea, just badly implemented. In fact, her own descriptions of mental patients completely undercut the claim that there is no such thing as madness, or that it has anything to teach the rest of us.

Both books heap blame on American psychiatry. Both show that the liberation ideologues and mental-health bar were pushing against an open door from the late fifties on. Not only had psychiatrists lost faith in large institutions, most of them were bored and embarrassed treating chronic mental patients. By definition,

* *Madness in the Streets: How Psychiatry and the Law Abandoned the Mentally Ill*, by Rael Jean Isaac and Virginia C. Armat. New York: The Free Press. 436 pp., $24.95; and *Out of Bedlam: The Truth About Deinstitutionalization*, by Ann Braden Johnson. New York: Basic Books. 306 pp., $22.95.

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chronics do not get better. Most shrinks were thrilled to get out of the state hospitals, and once they were working in community clinics, they actually shunned psychotic patients who followed them there. Johnson tells chillingly of these doctors' techniques: how they moved their offices without informing patients and made their waiting rooms so inhospitable that the very ill—who aren't good at being on time—simply found it too uncomfortable to bother with appointments. Community clinics concentrated by design on helping "the worried well"—middle-class people looking for counseling—and deinstitutionalized chronics simply fell through the cracks. On this, Isaac, Armat, and Johnson agree: the psychiatrists are the villains of the piece.

Still, these books differ on what it is that bothers them about deinstitutionalization. Johnson is concerned above all with the way government funding skewed the process and still impinges on what little care chronics get. She argues persuasively that the most important cause of deinstitutionalization was the states' unwillingness to pay for their big hospitals. (Average yearly costs per patient rose from $720 in 1949 to $41,650 in 1984!) At some point in the 1960s, federal funding made it cheaper to shunt patients into nursing homes, where they received only the poorest custodial care. Today, the flow of money still encourages institutional warehousing. As throughout her book, Johnson is admirably loyal to patients' interests and on target in her effort to shame the rest of us. That treatment of the chronic mentally ill will never yield dramatic results, and will grow more and more expensive, in no way gets us off the hook. We have to find ways to help these people if we are to make any claim to being a humane society.

Isaac and Armat have a different beef: they are irked by the rights-based logic that was used to justify emptying the hospitals. They concentrate their fire on the arguments of the libertarian lawyers—claims about patients' rights to autonomy, to leave the hospital, to forgo treatment, and to stop taking helpful medication. Isaac and Armat say the civil liberties bar won for these essentially incompetent patients the right to ruin their own and their families' lives. As the law stands today, patients can refuse care unless and until they are proved dangerous to themselves and others. The problem is that even a history of violence is rarely enough to demonstrate that someone is dangerous. Parents often watch helplessly as their disturbed children stop taking medication: their delusions and anger soon come to the surface; often they even threaten violence. Still, the parents cannot get them into a hospital until they are actually caught in a violent act. Often, of course, it is too late.

Isaac, Armat, and Johnson agree that many chronic patients will now and then have to go back into the hospital. Chronic mental illness is by nature a lifelong disease, and often there is no alternative to inpatient care. Where left and right differ is on the question of involuntary commitment. Can we force nonviolent people to stay in a hospital against their will? Can we force them to take medication they resent—even if it makes them feel better? Can we force them to undergo electric shock treatment and even psychosurgery? Johnson says absolutely not: she sees involuntary hospitalization as "incarceration"—punishment, not treatment, designed for society's convenience.

Isaac and Armat argue that mental patients lack the ability to make an informed choice—and insisting on their right to such choices is absurd and inhumane. The conservatives' argument here is both medical and philosophical. Medically, they say, we must be realistic: there *is* such a thing as mental illness. Philosophically, they quote tellingly from John Stuart Mill. Not even Millian notions of liberty extended to children, the irrational, or the delirious: "Those who are still in a state to be taken care of by others," Mill wrote, "must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury."

In truth, the case for taking care of mental patients—and the rest of the homeless—is far too important to be left to conservatives. Isaac and Armat are right in their search for an alternative theory that would counterbalance rights-based thinking and justify compulsory care—in some instances, at least. But most of the arguments they come up with—about the rights of patients' families and the danger to the social order—sound either forced or grudgingly self-protective. A more humane argument

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would start from something like what communitarian political philosopher Michael Sandel calls the "obligation of mutual care." What the mentally ill need from us is not that we grant them their rights but rather that we shoulder some responsibility. Instead of arguing recklessly for homeless people's right to roam the streets, liberals ought to be thinking harder about what kind of care and treatment society owes them. The apt analogy is not a criminal—who does have certain rights to autonomy and due process—but an infant. No serious person would assert a small child's right to walk out the front door into a cold winter night; we understand implicitly that his parents have a responsibility to stop him.

This does not mean, of course, that patients have no rights—and in providing care, we must make every effort to safeguard those rights. We must learn to distinguish between the merely eccentric and the truly psychotic. To the degree that they can make decisions for themselves, they should be free to do so. Medications and involuntary hospitalization should be used as sparingly as possible. Hospital care must be top quality—no warehousing in dingy back wards. And alternatives, like twenty-four-hour companions during crises, should be available. Above all, we must develop and pay for the kind of nonrestrictive community care that we have been promising mental patients for thirty years. Isaac, Armat and Johnson more or less agree on what's needed. And most of the experimental treatment around the country involves the same components: some psychiatric supervision, the creation of an extended family unit (a halfway house or club or "pact") where patients can feel at home, training in "basic life skills" (from grooming to budgeting to eating in a restaurant), and, for most, some kind of work.

Not all the homeless will need that much care, but—if the skeptics are right about their mental health—many will. Whether their problems are caused by deinstitutionalization or by the pressures of underclass life, many hundreds of thousands may need extensive services over their entire lives. This will not come cheap, nor will it be politically popular. The civil libertarians who fought for deinstitutionalization should have noticed something wrong as early as the sixties when they found themselves allied with Governor Ronald Reagan, then determined to close all California mental hospitals in order to save money. The homeless, whether mentally ill or just plain troubled, are less in need of lawyers than of lobbyists—people who can make the case that we need to help. □

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Elliott Currie

CRIME IN THE MARKET SOCIETY

From Bad to Worse in the Nineties

To say that we are losing the war on crime is a cruel understatement. Today we are a nation reeling from rates of violent crime that in many places outstrip anything we have seen before in our history. The basic outline of this American tragedy is easy to sketch.

According to recent data from the U.S. Public Health Service, a young American male, aged fifteen to twenty-four, is seventy-three times more likely to die of deliberate homicide than his counterpart in Austria, forty-four times more likely than a Japanese youth, and about twenty times more likely than a young Englishman or Dane.

Worse, the risks of violence in America have *risen* in the past few years: and they have risen in the face of what by conventional measures was (until recently) touted as one of our longest sustained periods of "prosperity."

The year 1990 may prove to have been the most violent *ever* in many of our cities: the rate at which Americans killed one another in the first half of 1990 was a stunning 20 percent higher than in the same period in 1989 in cities of over a million population—and rates for 1989 were already an all-time record in many of those cities. Still more ominous, that rising violence exists together with the institutionalization of a larger and larger proportion of our population.

Our incarceration rate—more than triple that of our closest Western European competitor, the United Kingdom—has been rising even faster than the criminal violence it was supposed to stop. Our prison and jail population, having passed the one million mark in 1989, now constitutes a city about the size of Detroit. If we add those on probation or parole, we have a city of four million, making it the second largest in the United States.

It is predominantly a city of the young and the poor and especially, but not exclusively, the young *minority* poor. As we enter the nineties, according to a recent analysis by Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project, nearly one-fourth of young black men in the nation aged 20 to 29 are either behind bars, on probation, or on parole. In New York State, as a study by the Correctional Association of New York and the New York State Coalition for Criminal Justice points out, twice as many young black men are under "correctional supervision" as are attending college. And it is a city whose staggering costs have helped to bankrupt our other cities; in New York State the size of the prison budget is increasing by a stunning $50 million a month.

Beyond the bare numbers, the violence in our cities reflects a deepening social and spiritual disaster. Some examples, drawn almost at random from a pile of newspaper clippings:

- the annual burning of parts of Detroit on Halloween, which this year destroyed nearly two hundred buildings and left over a dozen families homeless;
- the beating, slashing, and, in one case, hacking to death of homeless men in New York that same Halloween by a gang of masked young men shouting "trick or treat";
- the rape, beating, and stabbing one hundred thirty-two times of a young black crack addict in Boston by a gang of kids looking for "a female to rob";
- seven killings in seven hours in New York City, including the shooting to death of a sixteen-

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year-old as he tried to defend a friend from robbers who wanted his Chicago Bulls jacket.

It is sometimes argued that the rising tide of urban violence in the United States only reflects the deadly imperatives of the drug trade—especially the crack "epidemic." The implication is that when the epidemic subsides, so will the plague of violent crime. Crack thus becomes an oddly comforting scapegoat for a crisis whose roots are deeper and more tangled. Crack—and other hard drugs—are certainly a big part of the reason for the violence in the cities; but they are only a part and not necessarily the most important part. In Washington, D.C., for example, while homicides have risen to new highs in 1990, the drug-related proportion has *fallen* substantially (to about a third) in the past few years.

The fear and outrage generated by endemic violence is compounded by a sense of helplessness. It is dramatically apparent that the conservative "solution" to crime has failed, but the vision of feasible alternatives has also receded. For many Americans, the roots of the disintegration of social life in the cities remain mysterious, the remedies elusive.

That is partly because of the quite successful effort by those now running the country to minimize the connections between the mounting urban violence and a decade of their own social and economic policies. Partly, too, it is because those of us who see those connections have failed to bring them sufficiently to light.

Let me suggest several ways in which conservative policies have aggravated the criminal violence that has made most of our cities nearly uninhabitable. These connections are deep and complex: it isn't just, for example, that a decade of conservative policy has increased urban employment. It's that the policies of the right are moving us toward a way of life—a civilization—that is destructive of the institutions that sustain personal character and social order.

Looking at several of those effects at once is crucial to understanding crime in the United States. It helps explain why some factors taken individually—say, the unemployment rate, or levels of poverty—may not always fit well as explanations of crime, a point much seized upon by some conservative observers. Looking at the role of these factors through a more holistic perspective helps us understand why poverty, for example, predictably breeds crime in some societies, at some point in their development, and not in others.

The Concept of Market Society

First let me make a distinction between "market economy" and "market society." All societies make some use of market mechanisms to allocate goods and services. Assessing what the market does well and what is best accomplished by other means is often an empirical question.

But "market *society*" is a different animal altogether. By market society I mean one in which the pursuit of private gain becomes the organizing principle for all areas of social life—not simply a mechanism that we may use to accomplish certain circumscribed economic ends.

In market society all other principles of social organization become subordinated to the overarching one of private gain. Alternative sources of livelihood, social support, and cultural value—even personal identity—become increasingly weakened, so that individuals, families, and communities are more and more dependent on what we somewhat misleadingly call the "free market" to provide for their needs—not only material needs but cultural, symbolic, and psychic ones as well. (I say somewhat misleadingly because in existing market societies some groups are increasingly able to protect themselves against the market's uncertainties.) The United States has long been the most market-dominated of Western industrial countries, the one with the least developed alternatives to the values and institutions of the market. And under the Reagan and Bush administrations, that domination has significantly increased. As a result, we are something of an experiment in the consequences of market-driven social policy. Rising crime is only one of those consequences—but one of the most visible. Here are five links between the advance of market society and the rise in crime.

1. *Market society promotes crime by increasing inequality and concentrated economic deprivation.*

In the United States the rise in violent crime has gone hand in hand with the sharpest rise of economic inequality in postwar history. The rise in economic inequality can be traced to

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several trends. One is the deterioration of the private and public labor markets, in which a great many former "middle-level" jobs—especially but not exclusively in blue-collar industry—have disappeared, replaced by a significant rise in extremely well-rewarded jobs at the top—and a much larger increase in poor jobs, including unstable and part-time ones, at the bottom.

That shift in the labor market is not a matter of "fate" or even of politically neutral changes in technology or demographics. It has been driven by conservative social policy in several ways:

- through the flight of capital and jobs to low-wage havens in the United States and overseas;
- through the lowering of the real value of the minimum wage, which ensures that new job creation has been overwhelmingly concentrated in poverty-level employment;
- through the weakening of the labor movement's capacity to organize in areas of new job creation and to hold the line against wage cuts.

The resulting tendency toward an "hourglass" income distribution is compounded by two other effects of conservative market policy: the erosion of income-support benefits for low-income people and the unemployed and a pattern of systematically regressive taxation. In the late 1970s our income-support benefits—already among the most meager in the developed world—brought about one in five poor families above the poverty line. Today, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the figure is closer to one in nine. Meanwhile, since 1977 the top 1 percent of income earners have seen their pretax income rise by 85 percent and their tax burden drop by 23 percent, while the bottom 20 percent of the population suffered a real income decline of about 12 percent and saw their tax burden *rise* by 3 percent.

Today we not only have about seven million more poor Americans than at the end of the 1970s: they are typically much poorer. And as the job structure has narrowed and income support shriveled, it is now far more difficult for them to get out—at least through legitimate means, a fact that is not lost on the urban poor, especially the young.

2. *Market society promotes crime by eroding the capacity of local communities for support, mutual provision, and effective socialization of the young.*

Under the sustained impact of market forces, communities suffer both from the loss of stable livelihoods and from the excessive geographic displacement that results from that loss. These losses are compounded in the United States by the crisis in housing for low-income people, as market forces drive up the cost of shelter at the same time that they drive down wages. The loss of stability of shelter, in turn, helps destroy local social cohesion.

Local communities suffering these stresses begin to exhibit a phenomenon some researchers call "drain." As the ability of families to support themselves and their children drops below a certain critical point, they can no longer sustain those informal networks of social support that might be a buffer against the economic grinding of the market. A family having tough times can't lean on neighbors or cousins—even if they still live in the same community—because *they* are having tough times too. This, in turn, helps us understand the third link:

3. *Market society promotes crime by isolating the family and subjecting it to stress.*

Economic deprivation and community fragmentation have put enormous pressures on family life. Conservatives talk endlessly about the importance of family values, but the reality is that market policies have brought disaster to low- and even middle-income families across the country, and that disaster is deeply implicated in the crime problem.

The long-term economic marginalization of entire communities inhibits the formation of stable families in the first place—as the sociologist William Julius Wilson has argued—by diminishing the "pool" of marriageable men—men seen as capable of supporting a family.

At the same time, the deterioration of the labor market and the spread of poverty-level wages have meant that many families—especially young families—can only stay afloat by working at two or even three jobs. The real incomes of families headed by someone under

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twenty-five dropped by over 23 percent between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, and that level has been maintained only because family members are working harder and longer. That has given us a generation of parents, especially young parents and single parents, who have virtually no leisure time and who are under constant stress.

To recognize the troubling results of these strains isn't to blame the parents. But it is true that the nurturing capacities of many families have been weakened and their children too often thrown back on their own resources and their own peer groups. Conservatives, of course, make much of this result in their own explanations of rising crime but conveniently ignore its *causes*.

The resulting "social impoverishment" fuses with economic deprivation to produce overwhelming stresses—stresses long associated with domestic violence and child abuse. (I do not think it's an accident that the foster-care caseload in New York City has tripled during the reigns of the Reagan and Bush administrations—or that child-abuse reports in California have risen by over 300 percent.)

4. *Market society promotes crime by withdrawing public services from those already stripped of economic security and communal support.*

Before the eighties, the United States was already notable for the absence of health care and family supports for all its citizens. The conservative ascendancy of the last decade undercut already meager public services, which could have stalled some of the damage inflicted by economic deprivation, family stress, and community disintegration.

For an understanding of urban crime, we can single out the effects of declining preventive health care and mental health services that might help some of the children most "at risk" of delinquency and drug abuse, the absence of intervention for families at high risk of severe child abuse, and the lack of adequate child care for low-income families whipsawed by low wages and overwork.

5. *Market society promotes crime by magnifying a culture of Darwinian competition for status and resources and by urging a level of consumption that it cannot provide for everyone.*

This cultural context helps explain why economic deprivation is so significant a source of crime in a market society and not necessarily in others.

The corrosive effects of market culture on social stability have been a theme in the study of crime for close to a century. Almost sixty years ago the great Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger argued that "[t]o make prosperity and culture as general as possible" was the "best preventive against crime." But he stressed that he meant "prosperity, not *luxury*": for "[t]here is not a weaker spot to be found in the social development of our times than the ever-growing and ever-intensifying covetousness, which, in its turn, is the result of powerful social forces." Bonger would surely be amazed by the degree to which "covetousness" has suffused American social life in the 1990s.

A market culture promotes crime by holding out standards of economic status and consumption that many cannot legitimately meet, thereby creating pressure for meeting them in illegitimate ways: and, more subtly, by weakening values supportive of the intrinsic worth of human life and well-being. Much violent street crime in America today directly expresses the consumerist values of immediate gratification; some of our delinquents will cheerfully acknowledge that they blew someone away for a pair of running shoes (or a suede jacket). The point is not simply to bemoan the ascendancy of such values among the urban young but to recognize that they are, as Bonger said, the "result of powerful social forces."

We also need to consider the impact on crime of the specifically psychological distortions of market society—its tendency to produce personalities less and less capable of relating to others except as consumer items or as a means to the consumption of goods or the attainment of social status. And we need to consider the long-term political impact of market society—in particular, its tendency to eclipse alternative political means by which the

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dispossessed might express their frustration and desperation..

It's not simply by increasing one or another discrete social ill that conservative market policies stimulate crime: it's through the growth and spread of a way of life that at its core is inimical to social order and personal security. In the words of another keen critic of market culture, R.H. Tawney, it is a "false magnetic pole that sets all the compasses wrong."

These trends have had their strongest impact on the young. As we move closer to a full-fledged market society in America, young people are increasingly left to grow up on their own, without consistent support or guidance, sometimes with untended physical or psychological damage; always with the lure of the consumer marketplace before them and with little opportunity to participate fully in that marketplace. This neglect is a recipe for disaster, and it helps explain why our American cities are the most dangerous in the developed world.

A "Basic Needs" Strategy for the Cities

Twenty-five years ago, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice worried that the "social institutions generally relied on to guide and control people in their individual and mutual existence" were "not operating effectively" in the cities. In the 1990s, the process of social disintegration has accelerated beyond what the commission could have imagined. The commission urged that the single most important thing we could do to reduce crime was to "seek to prevent crime before it happens by assuring all Americans a stake in the benefits and responsibilities of American life."

That is the opposite of what has happened. Twenty-five years after the President's Commission, twenty-two since the Kerner Commission warned of the destructive potential of the "vast unmet needs" in the cities and pointed to the growing gap between the "two societies, separate and unequal," we are witnessing the collapse of the institutional matrix of social life in the inner city and the exclusion of a broad stratum of Americans from citizenship. A decade's "unleashing" of the forces of the market on the cities has drastically eroded an already weak social infrastructure. A serious attack on the roots of violent crime in the cities means a campaign to rebuild the social infrastructure. And the first step must be to reverse the damage to public institutions that have been savaged by the policies of the past ten years.

I'm not calling for an "urban Marshall Plan" but for something more akin to a postindustrial version of the "basic needs" strategy often advocated for developing countries. In recent years our most distressed urban areas have descended into Third World conditions in which the most fundamental human needs for shelter, nurturance, and livelihood are routinely unmet. In many countries far poorer than the United States—China, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica—governments allocate enough resources to meet those needs so that minimum levels of social health and participation have risen dramatically. We should do no less here.

Such a strategy means extending the fundamentals of social citizenship to those now excluded from them—including public health care, effective schooling, early intervention with "high-risk" children, adequate public safety, family support and child care, and decent housing. Such a strategy can accomplish several things at once, all of which will help to reduce urban violence. It can strengthen the institutions through which the young are brought up to participate in a common social life. When we build new public institutions to serve basic human needs in the cities, we are simultaneously creating jobs that can stabilize communities and families and offer the young a better deal than Burger King or selling dope on the corner. More subtly, we are sending two important messages to people now excluded from full citizenship: we are telling them that we care what happens to them and that there is a place for them in society; and we are telling them that life is about something other than the scramble for consumer goods. Today, we impress upon the inner-city young that life is a Darwinian struggle in which only the hardest survive; our neglect broadcasts a message that

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the lives of other people, especially those more vulnerable, are not very important.

We may single out several especially pressing needs:

- The extension of Head Start-type programs to provide early education, nutrition, and social supports to all eligible children;
- Family-support programs—like the Prenatal/Early Infancy Project in Elmira, New York, and the Family Support Center in Yeadon, Pennsylvania—that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing child abuse among "high-risk" families;
- Comprehensive health care centers providing preventive medical care and help with drug and alcohol abuse in distressed communities;
- Increased low-income housing construction and rehabilitation, both to combat homelessness and to provide community-oriented jobs for the inner-city young;
- Expanded youth-service programs to employ the young in entry-level human-service roles in hard-hit communities (with children, the elderly, the ill);
- Expanded high-quality public child care, making use—as the psychologist Edward Zigler has suggested—of the existing facilities of the public schools.

The potential of many of these efforts is widely understood: the tougher issue involves paying for them. One possibility is a fund—we might call it a "Fund for Citizenship"—to be used for that kind of preventive social expenditure. Whatever the specific mechanism, what's clear is that a strategy to meet basic needs in America's cities requires a serious *public* commitment of resources.

Perhaps the most crippling barrier to doing anything effective about crime is the stubborn belief that the decay of urban institutions will be reversed by the expansion of the private economy. That hope leads many to urge yet further fiscal assaults on our already reeling urban public sector, in the belief that austerity today will pave the way for growth tomorrow. But if we've learned anything over the past generation it is that public tasks get done only by public institutions. The private economy has pronounced its verdict on the inner city. Those advanced industrial societies whose cities have weathered the wrenching social transformations of the past twenty years have done so by building the public institutions through which individuals can be nurtured. schooled, and made healthy.

How, it will be asked, can we afford to provide prenatal care or preschool education for all in the inner city when New York City can't even find the money to hire a couple of thousand more police, and a mobile police station in Philadelphia has been repossessed by the bank? The answer is that we can no longer afford *not* to spend for basic needs in the cities. We must move beyond our stalemated thinking about public spending—our failure to distinguish between those forms of social expenditure we can regard as constructive investments and those that are responses to the failure of economic and social policies—to sustain labor markets, families, and communities.

Skimping on the former, which tend to be less expensive, means pouring scarce resources into the latter. It's not accidental that states that have poured billions into prisons can't find money for people to police their streets, to teach preschoolers, or to help troubled kids. The verdict on programs like Head Start and family support is in; they are cost-effective, saving considerably more money than they absorb in the beginning. The savings tend to be long-term, the costs up front; and, like children or juvenile delinquents, we have great trouble taking the longer view. But it's time to grow up.

Twenty years ago we abandoned the vision of urban reconstruction offered by the Kerner Commission on the ground that it was unrealistic and expensive; since then, we've spent hundreds of billions of dollars to contain the consequences—far more than we would have needed to put its recommendations into practice.

What perceptive observers have said about urban crime for thirty years and more remains true. There are no shortcuts. There is no magic solution that can stop the violence that plagues us without addressing its causes and without spending money. To pretend otherwise is to feed into the paralysis and evasion that now ensure a legacy of fear and brutality for the next generation. □

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Peter G. Buckley

THE DANGEROUS CLASSES—THEN AND NOW

New Yorkers are no strangers to crime. In 1832, returning from a particularly raucous July 4 celebration, Philip Hone complained bitterly about the decline of the city of which he had once been mayor: "Squibs [firecrackers] were thrown with a perfect indifference to life and property, while ill-mannered boys shouted about the glories of a Republic." He concluded that it "would take a Napoleon or a Caesar" to govern New York effectively. A decade later, George Templeton Strong also lamented the changes that were sweeping over the "old" New York. From his home on Greenwich Street he could hear "sounds of drunkenness, mayhem and debauchery coming from Dutch lust-houses." In the face of such plebeian antics, both Hone and Strong joined the first "flight" from the city to the suburbs, which in their time, and for their class, meant the residential gentility of the Fifteenth Ward above Bleecker Street.

Perhaps we might expect such jeremiads from the old social elite as they were displaced from office holding through the years of the Jacksonian revolution; yet people of more modest means and pretensions also detected a threat to the city's social order. In 1845, the grocer Michael Floy was outraged at a case of assault as far north as the Bowery village and wondered whether God was punishing the city for its venality through unusual agents. The establishment of a professional police force in the same year did little to allay residents' fears; they were certainly not calmed by the arrival of a vigorous "penny" press whose "Court Reports," rather than presenting a calendar of royal appointments, disclosed a steady stream of dog-nappings, muggings, and sundry acts of gang and domestic violence. By the 1840s there were areas of downtown Manhattan that many residents considered inadvisable to enter without police protection. Sections of the waterfront and the notorious Five Points, just north of City Hall, were viewed as nests of degradation from which all kinds of contagion—sexual, moral, and political—would spread to infect the rest of the city. The Astor Place Riot of 1849, the Draft Riots of 1863, and the Orange Riot of 1871 appeared to confirm a well-worn metaphor of the century—that New Yorkers were sleeping over a volcano of "the dangerous classes."

Then as now, reformers and philanthropists tried to find the origins and answers to such social decline, to identify the populations at risk, and to sort out the connections between crime and poverty. The Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP), established in 1843, eagerly learned the language of poverty "science" from work done in London by Colquhoun and Chadwick. Making new distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, it attempted to end the many forms of indiscriminate charity by locating the poor at "home" and dispensing with older forms of outdoor relief, such as soup kitchens. Though the home visitors, forerunners of social workers, still handed out biblical tracts, the AICP was the first organization to trace petty crime to environmental causes.

One young reformer, Charles Loring Brace, caught up in the enthusiasm for rehabilitation, arrived from New Haven in 1849 to work with prisoners on Blackwell's Island. He soon

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found, however, that he encountered a class of men who showed no sign of being redeemed. The only way to halt the spread of the "dangerous classes"—Brace popularized the phrase in a book by that name in 1872—was to remove their children from parental supervision. With others, he founded the Children's Aid Society in 1854 for that purpose. In an obvious contrast to today's fears, it was popularly believed, or earnestly wished, that children could be saved from entering the dangerous classes given a touch of charity, religion, or removal.

To deal with the adults of the dangerous classes, the first line of defense was New York's "Finest"—a phrase from the mid-seventies. Respectable New Yorkers appear to have viewed their police as inefficient, corrupt, and somewhat effective. Because of the ties between police and ward politicians, the middle classes were reluctant to enlarge police powers; instead, they tolerated a wide degree of discretion, which meant a number of acknowledged extralegal options in dealing with suspected criminals. By the Civil War, there was a general willingness to see an armed police at the center of the criminal justice system rather than a judiciary that New Yorkers have traditionally thought too lenient. Tying the hands of the police with formal procedures could be detrimental to social order. As the *Herald* stated, if to check the dangerous classes "it were necessary for us to have a Turk as Chief of police, we, for our own parts, would go for the Turk, turban, Koran, and all."

Of course, the assumption in Brace's and other writings was that immigrants, mainly unskilled Irish, overwhelmingly contributed to the ranks of the dangerous classes, and because of universal male suffrage and generous access to citizenship, individual crimes and violence translated into a political problem. The main threat from the irredeemable tough was not a life of organized crime—that was to arrive in the 1880s—but rather a career in the kind of politics likely to subvert civic order. Quite late in the century, reformers still saw an answer to problems now considered "social" in the maintenance of political virtue and the strengthening of political institutions.

Hope seemed to be reborn with that "revival of civic spirit" that historians once labeled the Progressive Era. Much of the recent work on Progressive reform has stressed its continuity with earlier Protestant anxiety over immigrant morals, showing that the spirit was more Calvinist than Hegelian. However, progressivism certainly was novel in its wholesale questioning of laissez-faire principles in politics, policing, and charity. After the depression of 1893 and, more significantly, the defeat of Tammany a year later, middle-class New Yorkers and many of the "new" immigrants transferred their allegiance to municipal authority. Certainly a wide range of social groups, sharing in a language of civic improvement, expected from the newly consolidated Greater New York more equitable control of housing and transportation and increasing provision for education. The police, after the Lexow commission of 1893 had exposed the extent of corruption, began the long process, in Wilbur Miller's words, of seeking "a more professional, impersonal image, tying themselves more closely to the rule of law than in the past through both external pressures and internal efforts." Though the dangerous classes still remained, the presumed links between ethnic poverty, crime, and political corruption that had energized nineteenth-century reformers fell apart. The appearance of "syndicates" for prostitution, gambling, and theft only seemed to prove that crime was a discrete phenomenon that had to be matched by specialized laws and concerted policing; and the issue of race, after the First World War, was treated more as a matter of social and genetic pathology.

Today many New Yorkers are heading back to some of the features of Gilded Age rhetoric and practice, at least at the level of enforcement. The hankering after police "discretion," the rise of neighborhood vigilance groups, and the state's sponsorship of special business-district assessments for additional surveillance and protection show a rise in private solutions. Perhaps because it appears more practical to think of urban politics as a brokering of interests or as an engine for the provision of services and welfare, there is little left of the language of social cohesion that the Progressives once possessed. □

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Jean Bethke Elshtain and John Buell

FAMILIES IN TROUBLE

Signs of Difficulty, Possible Remedies

There is mounting evidence that American children are more and more in peril, in part because they are less and less assured of the sustained care, support, and safety that comes only with order in their immediate environments. Children are bearing the brunt of a profound cultural shift whose negative features we are now in a position to observe and whose continuing costs will last much longer than our own lifetimes.

Youth themselves, that always suspect category, appear to confirm such dire assessments. Under the headline "Profiles of Today's Youths: Many Just Don't Seem to Care," the *New York Times* recently sketched a portrait of an "indifferent generation." The most apathetic and alienated are eighteen to twenty-nine years old. The decline of the family is cited as one reason for the appearance of the civically uninterested and cynically self-interested as a paradigm for young adulthood—that, and the paucity of "civic education." Even People for the American Way hopped on the bandwagon, arguing in a report that "young people seem to have a half-formed understanding of citizenship, stressing rights but ignoring responsibilities." This assessment is reinforced by the *Times* survey, which indicated that the only issues that get the attention of the young are those that stress personal freedom narrowly construed.

Another *Times* report sketched the "rising tide of violence" by adolescents, "with a record 100,000 of them confined in correctional institutions on any given day." Judicial services are stretched to the breaking point. The cost of expanding jails and other facilities threatens to break the back of many state budgets. The "rehabilitative" approach is at least as costly as "getting tough," and the evidence suggests it is not arguably more effective. Massachusetts spearheaded the rehabilitative course of treatment, but its current commissioner of the Department of Youth Services concurs with the deputy superintendent of the Boston Police Department when he claims, "We have never had the violence among young people we are experiencing today."

The data tell the tale: since 1975 murders committed by juveniles have increased three times, rape two times, robberies five times. In 1989 the House Committee on Children, Youth and Families reported a "national emergency" of growing violence by and against youth, with homicide becoming the leading killer of black males ages fifteen to twenty-four, whose victimizers are themselves black males in the same age bracket. Notes the *Times:* "Most experts agree that the violence reflects a breakdown of families, schools and other community institutions."

Even as violence wipes out thousands of young people each year and throws thousands of others into the arms of a strained judicial system, nearly one in four American infants is born to an unmarried mother, six times as many as four decades ago. In 1950, by contrast, the figure was a mere 4 percent. The percentage of black infants born to unmarried mothers was 62 percent, compared with 17 percent of white infants. "These figures are alarming," according to Evelyn Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Women.

Terrible misery is encapsulated in such

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figures: high mortality rates for newborns or newborns with many health problems, including growing rates of crack-addicted babies, and further pressure on a welfare system that has done precious little to create policies that encourage marriage and employment, factors that, together with completion of high school, remain the single most effective assurances of a life not lived in poverty. That is, all credible studies show a strong positive correlation between completion of high school and marriage and subsequent long-term employment. Obviously, there are no guarantees. But we do know that the present welfare system promotes forms of clientage that further erode familial and community solidarity.

Karl Zinsmeister in a piece in the *Atlantic*, "Growing up Scared," offers a terrifying portrait of the ways in which increasing numbers of American children are being scarred by violence in the home, in the schools, and on the streets. The strongest predictors of domestic violence are single-parent households, unmarried couples (often a biological mother and her children with a boyfriend unrelated to those children either by birth or by acceptance of legitimate, legal responsibility for their well-being), and un- or undersupervised foster care situations. This "collapse of family structure," argues Zinsmeister, is "historically unprecedented in the United States and possibly in the world." Fully 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions "grew up in single-parent or no-parent families. One recent study of seventy-two adolescent murderers found that three-quarters came from single parent homes." None of this is surprising, nor is it "blaming the victim," a by-now tedious retort aimed at silencing any serious discussion of the troubles we face.

Parenting under modern conditions is hard for two dedicated people to handle well. Facing that task alone, in deteriorated housing, in broken-down neighborhoods, in poverty, or in the grip of drug dependency makes it harder still. Why should anyone be surprised that children are beaten, women brutalized, and men, too—with women overcoming the physical strength disparity through the use of handguns against abusive partners. Even if children aren't abused under these circumstances, they live in fear. The National Adolescent Student Health Survey indicates that "nearly two percent of all students [338,000 students nationwide] carried a handgun to school at least once" in 1987. We have fear at home, fear in the halls, fear in the streets, with more of the same to follow unless ways are found to rebuild communities by saving what can be saved of the essential mediating institutions of families, churches, neighborhoods.

Before moving to an alternative way of thinking about families that eschews the by-now familiar ritual dance between "more welfare state" as the panacea or "more free market and individual responsibility" as the solution to our ills, let us note that despite the massive changes of the past three decades most people in our society still desire families consisting of two parents with their children. The data on this are utterly clear and undeniable. We remain devoted to a strong picture of family life. Family imagery permeates our deepest aspirations, fears, resentments, and hopes. But we have made it almost impossible for families to flourish. Contemporary American society puts sustained pressure on families to succumb to an increasingly driven and harsh cultural surround. Family experts have long tried to cajole us with jargonish language along the lines of, "It's no decline, it's merely change." Social science pieties reassure us that what may seem to most ordinary Americans to be a "breakdown" in families, neighborhoods, and communities is, in reality, a process of "adjustment" as old-fashioned ways slowly come to conform to newer realities representing "progress."

While growing maternal employment and family diversity are important trends, more than one-third of all families with preschool children consist of homemaker mothers married to breadwinner fathers. Indeed, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics, this "traditional" family comprises the nation's largest single category of families with preschool children. The most recent survey of mothers by the Roper Organization and Whittle Communications not only finds hostility toward nonwork-

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ing mothers from working mothers and vice versa but reports that fully two-thirds of working mothers see themselves as working out of necessity, not by choice. Half the working mothers say they envy the mothers who do not have to work. This appears to run counter to the incessant P.R. that pictures work as some sort of "fulfillment" the only irritant the lack of money from the government to fund day care and parental leave. But this isn't the way those on the front lines view the matter. The experts and ideologues have failed to consult their ostensible constituencies—the world of middle- and lower-middle-class families, struggling to stay afloat and to sustain the ideal of family life the professionals say is on the wane and to which some say "good riddance."

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, who spent much of the late 1980s doing focus group research with lower-middle- and middle-class families, argues that our national debate on the family "is being conducted in two separate languages. The first is official language, spoken by experts and opinion leaders in politics, the media and academy. The second is family language, spoken by ordinary middle class families." These languages are foreign to one another. The preoccupation of the official debate is how to get both parents into full-time work and fund child care. But the "prime subject of the grassroots conversation is how parents can do a decent job of raising their kids in a culture that is unfriendly to parents and children." The "emotional core of family concerns in grassroots America" is a pervasive fear that "their children are adopting the values of an aggressively materialistic, individualistic and consumerist culture." What dominates family talk by contrast to expert talk is "moral education," not more and better programs designed to fill the gaps left as the family is deinstitutionalized.

Whitehead found that the vast majority of parents believe that "the safest and best child care is provided by a parent or a close relative," and they design child care arrangements to follow this principle. At great effort, they "arrange their working lives to maximize the time their child spends in the care of a parent or relative and to minimize the time spent with nonrelatives." They do this by working different shifts or combining a night or weekend job with a weekday job. Is this evidence of a benighted and fearful traditionalism or a recognition that children are best served when those caring for them have a strong and continuing emotional link to them as individuals rather than as the generic users of a paid-for service? Whiteheads' parents had no doubt that children were suffering when they lacked the time and attention of others uniquely devoted to their well-being.

Whitehead also found what she called a "strong and highly emotional consensus" about perceived hostile forces. "Parents," she reports, "are mad as hell at what they see as dominant values in the culture. What hurts their ability to raise their kids . . . is materialism." For parents this isn't merely a pocketbook issue but a matter of basic values, as is another issue that emerged as a dominant concern—loss of time with children. Whitehead concludes that the "fundamental conflict between parent-as-parent and parent-as-paid-worker is the single deepest source of stress and anxiety in the American family today." Parents told her they could no longer raise their children properly because they had "no time." They weren't doing their duty as parents simply by providing basic needs and even luxuries. What they needed was time to teach "sound values," but that time more and more evaporates. Here the classic fissure in American society between individualism and community really hits home, and individualism, cast in a distinctly materialistic mode, seems to be winning. More and better day care, therefore, is not perceived as a "solution" by these parents because it does nothing about the problem of too little time.

With this cluster of articulated discontents, one can begin to raise fresh questions about culture and priorities and what implications might flow for family policy itself. How can we create the conditions that help sustain the desperate efforts of parents to hold their families together and to give their children a moral education? A family-leave policy would help. So would guarantees of decent health

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care. Day care is a dilemma, for if we listen to parents, what is most needed is more time to spend with children rather than more assistance in providing out-of-home care for children.

Being a parent isn't just another "life-style." Raising a child is rather weightier than raising exotic fish. Much of the soothing expert talk has run along the lines of being open to alternative arrangements, treating "life-styles" as morally identical peas in a pod. To be sure, families coexist with those who live another way, whether heterosexual and homosexual unions that are by choice or definition childless, and so on. But the acceptance of plural possibilities does not mean each alternative is equal to every other regarding specific social goods. No social order has ever existed—not one—that did not privilege certain practices as preferable to others. Every social order forges terms of inclusion and exclusion. Ethically responsible challenges may loosen those terms, but they do not negate a normative endorsement of family life. This is what parents are saying—despite the fact that no one appears to be listening. What happens if one does listen?

First, one must tend to what might be called "the politics of time." John Buell has argued for several years that any discourse about the family must take a long, hard look at the question of time. He claims that despite their technological affluence Americans enjoy less leisure time than did Stone Age men and women. After dramatic progress was made in reducing hours of work between 1900 and the New Deal, efforts at work-hour reduction stalled. The upshot is that more of us work outside the home and for longer periods of time than has been true for any civilization in history. Forty hours remains the norm, but high-stressed middle- to upper-middle-class families find "bread winners" putting in many more hours, as do the wage earners in lower-middle-class homes, where at least one spouse may work several jobs. Through all this driven effort, we have created a society dominated by what Hegel rightly saw as an endless dialectic of "needs creation," the world of the market and its social relations. Yet many Americans are unemployed or underemployed. Perhaps future increases in productivity could be taken in the form of shorter hours, rather than in the proliferation of more goods and services, which only create new needs and addictions.

Buell argues that among the many benefits a shortening of the work week, hence a reconceptualizing of work in the construction of human identity, opens up is the greater possibility of coparenting. Where the value of the home as a center of economic and cultural activity was once again recognized, the demand for greater child care involvement and household responsibilities would not be so threatening to so many men. The family would be better able to foster self-reliant persons who understand that they have responsibilities to others that are not simply instrumental. The basic question is: what is growth for? Is it an end in itself or should it be seen as a way to enhance the possibility that persons—parents, in this case—will fulfill their ideals of the vocation they have undertaken?

Second, a child support strategy should speak to the fact that the single most favored ideal of family life, among all groups and across all income levels, is the two-parent family. One problem with giant child care bills that privilege government-provided services is that they disproportionately channel benefits to two-career families, thereby transferring tax dollars from the lower-middle-class and the poor to the middle class. Relying on the state and on a licensing system that threatens to wipe out small, informal neighborhood and community child-care arrangements would contribute to trends that are currently part of the problem.

A better solution, or at least a place to start, would be the provision of income tax credits to families where at least one parent works and where the family is earning less than $11,000 per year. On grounds of distributive justice this seems correct. Funneling benefits to those most in need in a way that encourages rather than penalizes family maintenance is the way to go. Universal social policies (like Social Security) are more politically viable than provision of high-priced services disproportionately available to a few. Minimally, child-care policies should help to sustain a family life centered on children. But the burden of proof must be

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placed on those who would interfere with, or substitute for, the family.

As Theda Skocpol has argued, "Newly devised policies must speak with a consistent moral voice to all Americans, whether as recipients or as taxpayers, reinforcing rather than undermining fundamental values such as rewards for work, opportunities for individual betterment, and responsibility for the care of children and other vulnerable people." Thus, in addition to refundable tax credits as a way to direct assistance, a family-leave policy that helps parents raise their children is needed. Such a program must be designed in a way that parents are helped through the moment of a child's birth but, at the same time, the regulations and requirements are not so cumbersome as to threaten to devastate small "mom-and-pop" businesses, which often work out such arrangements with their employees in any case.

It is clear that families are stressed, but there is ample evidence that getting more of us into full-time labor so that we can buy more services and goods that, in turn, create further needs and expectations only traps us in an ever more stressful economic treadmill. In the long run, child care and family life will be better served by policies shortening working hours and easing the time constraints on working parents, rather than enabling the driven ascetism of the upwardly mobile to become the norm to which all will be forced to aspire.

Finally, we must tend to a workable public philosophy. By that we do not mean an overarching dogma or agenda; rather, we have in mind the more modest but no less vital effort of locating where our deepest values lie—where the best part of ourselves resides. We might yet perform a rescue operation that preserves the best about American society—its generosity, its sense of spontaneous concern for others, its volatile mingling of rootedness with individual freedom. For all our success in modern America, there is a sense that something has gone terribly awry. We rightly cherish our freedom, Alan Wolfe has argued in his recent book, *Whose Keeper?*, but we are "confused when it comes to recognizing the social obligations that make . . . freedom possible in the first place." This confusion permeates all levels from the marketplace to the home.

The political fallout of our moral crisis is reflected in the irony of a morally exhausted left embracing rather than challenging the logic of the market by endorsing the relentless translation of *wants* into *rights*. Although the left continues to argue for taming the market in a strictly economic sense, it follows the market model where social relations are concerned, seeing in any restriction of any sort of lifestyle an unacceptable diminution of choice. On the other hand, many conservatives love the untrammeled (or the less trammeled, the better) operations of the market in economic life but call for a restoration of traditional morality, including strict sexual scripts for men and women in social life. Both these logics are doomed to self-destruct. Why? Wolfe responds: because they rely either on the market or the state "to organize their codes of moral obligation" when what we really need is "civil society—families, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, voluntarism, spontaneous groups and movements—not to reject, but to complete the project of modernity." Children growing up outside richly textured, complexly obligated networks of specific others are deprived of the most precious gift of all—"the gift of society."

This call for a recuperation of "mediating institutions" is not yet another lament for a return to the past, but it is a call for a rethinking of what in and from the past is worth cherishing and preserving. The "new" may be cheap and bogus—its newness guarantees nothing about its value. Children lost to society in increasing numbers may be a growing phenomenon but it is one we must name for what it is: a loss, a crying shame. Protecting, preserving, and strengthening family autonomy is a way of affirming our commitment to the individual and to that democratic society that best speaks to the aspirations of individuals. The rights of persons are fundamentally social. What is at stake in the family debate, and our response to it, is nothing less than our capacity for human sociality. □

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Daniel Lazare

COLLAPSE OF A CITY

Growth and Decay of Camden, New Jersey

Thomas Roberts, Camden, New Jersey's affable director of economic redevelopment, used to be optimistic about bringing his moribund waterfront city back to life. "But then I saw *Roger & Me*," he says, "and I realized it would not be an overnight redevelopment, but would take a long, long time."

Indeed, Camden—8.6 square miles of urban devastation across the Delaware River from Philadelphia—has so many problems it makes filmmaker Michael Moore's Flint, Michigan, seem poised for takeoff. Where Flint has been reeling under a wave of Japanese auto imports since the 1970s, Camden has been on the skids since its shipyards went into decline in the forties. Flint still has its local gentry, judging from Moore's film, its blue-rinsed ladies complaining about lazy, laid-off auto workers, while Camden's gentry departed long ago. Evictions for nonpayment of rent form a running theme in *Roger & Me*; yet so many people have fled Camden over the last three decades, it's surprising that anyone is left to pay rent at all.

Today, Camden is less a city than a shell. It has 84,580 people, a third less than its peak around 1950, and just 10,000 jobs, half of them in the public and nonprofit "institutional" sectors. It has no supermarkets, no movie theaters, and a tiny downtown shopping district that makes Harlem's 125th Street seem lavish. More than 60 percent of its residents are on public assistance, and local people say the busiest time is the first of the month, when welfare checks arrive. The city has the highest property tax rate in the state, as well as one of the highest tax delinquency rates. It has two prisons, a thriving prostitution and drug trade, and a murder rate well above New York's. As of 1985, per capita income stood at $5,700—$800 less than Newark, $1,500 less than the hard-hit former silk-weaving center of Paterson, and barely a third of what suburbanites make in neighboring Cherry Hill. In an overwhelmingly white county of 495,000 people, it is 80 percent black and Hispanic.

Camden does have one asset, though—parking. City officials are quick to cite the abundance of cheap, downtown parking. But what they don't mention is that Camden has so much flat space because roughly two out of three buildings have been leveled in what was once a bustling business district. Every year, the asphalt expands, the number of out-of-town motorists with business in the city decreases, while Camden's position in the regional economy grows ever more marginal.

How did Camden fall so low? And why, as judged from the widening gap between city and state per capita income (down 17 percent in real terms from 1972–87 in one instance, up 24 percent in the second), is its condition growing worse? Mainstream urbanologists, steeped in an ideology of liberal individualism, usually begin with the assumption that the urban crisis is an extension of the crisis of the underclass, that personal and cultural dysfunction breeds economic failure. For Marxists, the opposite is more likely to be true. Cities, they presume, no more decline because their citizens have grown poor and degraded than factories fail because their workers have grown unaccountably lazy and unproductive. Rather, the market shifts, technology changes, or something about the

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reigning political ethos is transformed, resulting in declining productivity and good machinery gone to rust. Cities per se are not outmoded. In most of the rest of the world, they remain a basic unit of production, places where people go to buy, to work, and to sell. In the United States, many of them are economic wastelands that buyers, sellers, and workers avoid. Those who fall into them (or, due to racial and economic factors, have been pushed) are cut off from jobs, robbed of dignity, battered by crime, and forced to rely on welfare, drug dealing, or prostitution. "City air makes one free," the saying went in the Middle Ages. To which anyone surveying the chaos of an East St. Louis or Detroit might reply with another medieval slogan: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

Death by Suburbanization

It's not that cities are obsolete, but that something about America has caused them to collapse. Camden, perhaps the poorest city in the Northeast, is an unusually grim example. First settled in 1688, it grew modestly but steadily through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a ferry and handicraft center, an agricultural hub for rural South Jersey. By the 1820s, it was a loosely bound collection of a half dozen villages located about half a mile apart from one another, the largest consisting of more than 360 homes and other structures. With the arrival of steam power in the 1830s, Camden expanded into a rail, shipping, and industrial center. Campbell's, still in its presoup days, opened an agricultural processing plant in the city in the 1860s. The New York Shipbuilding Co. established what were to become Camden's renowned shipyards in 1899. By the early 1900s, Enrico Caruso was dropping by the Victor Talking Machine Co. (later RCA-Victor) to make records, while by 1920 industrial activity had reached such intensity along the Camden and Philadelphia waterfronts that a ferry traveler could observe that "[s]moke from hundreds of factories along the river on both sides fell like a blanket to the surface of the stream, enveloping all moving craft in a complete shroud of mist."

Factory smoke during this period also blanketed the waterfronts of Brooklyn, St. Louis-East St. Louis, Buffalo, and so on. The assumption across the political spectrum was that it would go on blanketing the waterfront. Urban industrialism was the norm, it was assumed, as was urban concentration. Yet this assumption was wrong. The turning point for cities like Camden was the period around World War I, when suburbanization was just getting underway and American cities were feeling the first effects of what modern urbanologists describe as a profound spatial reorganization.

One factor was motorization. Whereas in Europe the automobile remained an elite mode of conveyance until well after World War II, in this country it was embraced by the American middle class virtually from the start. New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the union and one of the most thoroughly middle class, had 17,619 cars in operation by 1907, some 163,500 by 1918, and more than 800,000 by 1929, one for every five residents. This was twice as many cars per capita as Canada and New Zealand, nine times as many as France and the United Kingdom, and forty times as many as Germany. The consequences were dramatic. Cities that once seemed powerful suddenly seemed small and constraining. A great outward expansion took place as motorists spread out over the countryside, cutting themselves loose from rail lines and streetcars.

Equally important were political changes unfolding around this time. In 1917 New Jersey adopted a law granting local residents sweeping powers to reorganize as separate municipalities. While in keeping with movements around the country to check the expansion of big cities, New Jersey's went considerably further by granting nearly unlimited powers to secede. Unlimited secession meant unlimited municipal tax evasion. Residents of one neighborhood who didn't like paying for streetlights in another no longer had to engage in the tedious rituals of municipal democracy. Instead, they simply incorporated as a separate, self-contained township. Sixty-four municipalities sprang into existence in New Jersey in the 1920s, including a couple of country clubs

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outside Camden whose members, in the ultimate absurdity, voted to incorporate to get around local blue laws prohibiting Sunday golfing.

For the suburbs, the new order was a form of liberation; for the cities, a new type of economic warfare. Ringed by hostile suburbs, one urban center after another in New Jersey found itself too small and with too few taxable assets to remain financially viable. Class conflict and the hysterical right-wing mood of the post–World War I period added to the siege mentality. In 1919, factory workers in Camden rioted in response to a hike in streetcar fares, prompting mobilization of the state militia. Inspired by the Palmer raids, local papers ran daily articles on topics like the "Bolshevist Menace and How to Cure It," while a local theater screened a film called *Bolshevism on Trial* and police rounded up twenty-six Russian-born shipyard workers described as Bolsheviks and Wobblies following a spate of posters calling for a general strike. While rural preachers thundered against speakeasies and subversion and the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses in the New Jersey countryside, cities became fixed in the popular imagination as centers of sin and subversion, Jews and blacks. They were dirty, crowded, and, most of all, *uncontrolled*. "I hope I never see a trolley again," one realtor exclaimed after a streetcar strike in 1923, and over the next dozen years, Camden's trolley lines, backbone of its transport system, would be dismantled.

The new order resulted in a new distribution of population: while Camden's leveled off during the twenties, the rest of the county's doubled. Immigrants and blacks poured into the city as middle-class residents poured out. With motorization, Camden's role as a rail hub and trolley center declined. Intense traffic congestion, no small factor in the decline of urban America, left the city noisier than ever, while widening roads and installing off-street parking merely removed valuable real estate from the tax rolls. If Camden had been like Brooklyn, part of a larger river-straddling metropolis, its fortunes might have turned out differently. It would have shared in the larger city's tax base, benefited from its municipal services, and exercised greater clout over the state legislature. Cut off from Philadelphia, however, by a state boundary, its fate was destined to become more like that of East St. Louis, a city these days that is more than bankrupt; it is actually insolvent.

Throughout New Jersey, a state that has long defined itself through hostility to the urban giants of New York and Philadelphia, the anti-urban tide seemed irresistible. Jersey City found itself hemmed in with less than 15 square miles, while Paterson, site of the great silk strikes of the 1910s and twenties, was limited to just 8.5. In Newark, frozen at just 24 square miles, the middle-class exodus was alarming. In 1916, 54 percent of the officers and directors of the city's chamber of commerce lived in Newark proper. By 1929, the number was down to 36 percent. In 1940, a proposal to consolidate Newark and its neighboring communities into a single, more efficient municipal unit ran into fierce resistance in the suburbs. As the *National Municipal Review*, a proconsolidation organ, explained:

> [A] local patriotism, particularly in some of the wealthier and "exclusive" communities, is of such intensity that many would justify an individual existence of these communities for the prestige of their name alone. Closely allied with these sentiments is the fear of joining with Newark and its large foreign-born and Negro population.

Battle lines hardened as suburbanites sought to bottle up the cities with their immigrants, racial minorities, political strife and unsettling new ideologies, and heavy industry. Smoke-blanketed waterfronts had no place in the suburban arcadia to which the middle class now aspired. As Lewis Mumford observed:

> In the suburb one might live and die without marring the image of an innocent world, except when some shadow of its evil fell over a column in the newspaper. Thus the suburb served as an asylum for the preservation of illusion. Here domesticity could flourish, forgetful of the exploitation on which so much of it was based. Here individuality could prosper, oblivious of the pervasive regimentation beyond. This was not merely a child-centered environment; it was based

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on a childish view of the world, in which reality was sacrificed to the pleasure principle.

Auto Menace

De-urbanization flowed from no one cause, but rather from a systemic change in the American mode of production. In the post–World War I period, the middle class found itself with the technology and political power to remake the world much as it wanted it to be, a world based on private cars, private homes, leafy tree-lined streets, and small businesses. Despite a history of trade-union militance, the American working class had no political basis for counterposing a socialist program based on public transit, public housing, continued support for heavy industry, and the development of cities that would not only be economically productive but safe, attractive, and livable.

In Europe, workers had mass organizations, a broad-based socialist consciousness that filtered events and conditions through the prism of class politics, plus a sense of place and history that came from centuries of urban living. Until the great burst of post–World War II prosperity, cars in Western Europe were seen as conveyances for the rich, whereas trams, trains, and bicycles were for proletarians. In the United States, cars were so abundant that even landless peasants rode around in them (as Soviet citizens discovered to their astonishment when the movie version of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* made its way to the USSR). Americans were also conscious of inequality, to be sure, although usually from a populist perspective. The enemy was not capitalism, it seemed, merely the inequitable distribution of capitalism's fruits. The answer to auto-fueled de-urbanization, consequently, was not stiff gas taxes to fund mass transit, but cheap gas, cheap roads, and hence more cars; tax credits to fund private homes; and easy consumer credit to finance things like televisions, dishwashers, and backyard pools. Consumer abundance was to be the great leveler. Yet as the era of the common man accelerated, social atomization worsened. "The ultimate solution," declared Henry Ford in 1922, "will be the abandonment of the city, its abandonment as a blunder." It was a prescription the United States earnestly set about putting into practice.

The thirties put a temporary halt to de-urbanization in Camden by imposing a brake on suburban development, whereas the forties saw something of a reversal as driving was curtailed due to gasoline rationing and workers poured into Camden's shipyards to meet the demands of wartime production. With demobilization, the miniboom burst. The years 1946 to 49 saw a renewed strike wave resulting in large-scale capital flight. A series of disastrous fires destroyed the ferry terminal and slips, a convention hall, and a major church, leaving the city permanently scarred. In keeping with the scorched-earth urban renewal policy of the day, older buildings were razed to make way for new ones that never seemed to get built. Within ten years, the local newspaper, the *Courier-Post*, had deserted Camden for suburban Cherry Hill, while the downtown shopping district grew frighteningly seedy. "It won't be long before the street is in darkness," a local realtor said of Broadway, the city's main shopping strip.

Yet the decay had barely begun. Following criticism by the Navy for shoddy workmanship, a breakdown in labor-management relations, and poor corporate leadership, the New York Shipbuilding Co., Camden's largest employer, closed in the early sixties, eliminating thousands of jobs. In 1961 the country's largest indoor shopping mall opened in Cherry Hill, robbing Camden of its role as a regional retail center. With the rise of a civil rights movement capable of dealing heroically with Jim Crow laws in the South but unequipped to respond to the urban economic implosion in the North, racial discord rose and white flight turned into a panicky rout.

New Jersey officials responded with half-measures that did nothing to restore Camden to health and everything to increase its dependence on the state. They leaned on public or nonprofit institutions, such as hospitals and the local branch of Rutgers University, to remain in Camden and expand. This provided jobs, but did nothing to pay property taxes, nearly the sole form of municipal income in New Jersey,

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and in fact removed significant chunks of real estate from the tax rolls. Large, heavily guarded parking lots, installed to allow students, doctors, and others to zip in and out of town, ensured that the economic spillover for local shops would be minimal. In an early form of supply-side economics, the state heaped generous tax breaks on local developers, thereby adding to the tax burden on existing property owners. In the mid-eighties, officials heralded the construction of a splashy new marina, the city's first, as a symbol of a gentrified, postindustrial Camden. Within a few years the marina would go belly-up. Not long after, the state embarked on construction of a $42 million state-of-the-art waterfront aquarium that would supposedly help pump tourist money into the city. Even if nervous suburbanites can be persuaded to drop by for a visit, plans call for it to be served by yet another of Camden's parking lots, meaning that visitors will most likely bundle the kids back into the car as soon as they're finished, without sticking around to sample Camden's other delights.

Today, Camden is a city without a raison d'etre. Campbell's Soup has closed its processing plant, laying off 900 workers, while RCA is considering moving 1,800 workers out of the old RCA-Victor plant. Once a stage, ferry, and rail hub, the city is now dwarfed by a sprawling highway system that allows motorists to speed past it. Four highways cross the Delaware between Philadelphia and New Jersey, but only one touches Camden, nicking its southern corner. The city has an excellent rapid transit link to downtown Philadelphia; yet due to the oversupply of highway transport, it is sparsely used. In the late seventies, an effort was made to alleviate Camden's isolation by building a north-south controlled-access highway through the center of town linking two east-west arteries. In addition to dividing the city in half and removing hundreds of yards of taxable real estate, the chief effect has been to provide Camden's vestigial business community with an even quicker means of escape. "Sometimes I think if there weren't the government offices, the town just wouldn't be here any more," says Mary Alison Albright, an assistant county prosecutor who works in downtown Camden but lives in one of the outlying suburbs. "It's a city to drive through. It goes by like a blur." Yet for the majority of Camdenites, who do not own cars, it is a city without exit. Just a few miles away are malls, spacious suburban homes, and safe, well-funded public schools. But Camden and its suburbs might as well be on different planets.

Havoc and Revolt

The story doesn't end there. While Camden has been effectively bottled up, the factors that caused its demise have gone on to wreak havoc with the rest of the state. Home rule, the doctrine by which New Jersey's 567 municipalities are allowed to sink or swim, means that regional planning is nil. Near-total reliance on property taxes for municipal expenditures means that every city, township, and borough must engage in an all-against-all struggle for a profitable mix of tax assets, resulting in a depressingly uniform pattern of malls, strip-zoned shopping centers, and suburban tract housing overspreading the countryside. Excessive motorization has led to hypermobility, so that if Camden is a city to drive through, the state's highway-bound suburbs are as well. "You live in New Jersey? What exit?" has become the semi-official state joke, just as Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run," a lurid tale of motorcycle madness and highway alienation, has become the semi-official state song. Because development breeds traffic, builders spent the boom years of the eighties ranging farther and farther afield in search of as-yet-uncongested markets. From 1981–87, the number of cars, trucks, and buses in New Jersey rose by 40 percent, triple the national rate, while the state road system expanded by less than 2 percent. Predictably, traffic congestion exploded from a minor annoyance to, in many areas, a minor crisis.

Slash-and-burn suburban development, which began with urban immolation, turns out to contain the seeds of its own destruction. Beginning in the late seventies, office parks and shopping malls in search of a swanky mailing address began springing up along Route 1 outside of Princeton Borough. Yet within a dozen years construction in what was

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once one of the hottest real-estate corridors in the country was at a standstill; the office vacancy rate exceeded 30 percent, and the state was contemplating spending $750 million to unsnarl traffic that immobilizes the strip several hours a day. Because declining development means a stagnant municipal tax base, the great suburban bust that settled on New Jersey following the 1987 stock market crash meant higher property tax rates as municipalities struggle to keep up with rising costs. Homeowners in the depressed Northeast were caught between the hammer of falling real estate values and the anvil of rising taxes. And they also found themselves called upon to do more for their hard-hit city brethren.

It was a recipe for a political explosion, as Jim Florio has since discovered. A graduate of Rutgers Law School in Camden and a former congressman from Camden County, Florio ran for governor in 1989 assuring voters that he foresaw no immediate need to raise taxes. Once in office, however, he (1) remembered that his Republican predecessor, Tom Kean, had left a $900-million budget deficit and (2) that a 1989 state Supreme Court ruling required the state to equalize spending between its wealthiest school districts and its poorest. Florio astonished friend and foe by slashing expenditures and raising sales and income taxes not only to balance the budget but also to generate an additional $1 billion for urban school aid. Clearly, Florio's campaign promises were disingenuous, although supporters defended them on the quasi-Jesuitical grounds that they were a sin in the service of a higher morality—to put a stop to a grossly inequitable system that taxed urbanites to the hilt while permitting suburbanites to pay less for a better public education. The public was not so understanding, however. In statewide protests, suburbanites made it clear that they didn't care about the governor's budget troubles and didn't want to hear about the plight of depressed inner cities. They wanted the state to take care of traffic, garbage-disposal, and the property-tax crises, yet demanded to be left alone in *their* suburban fortresses to spend *their* municipal tax dollars as they saw fit.

Ironically, several leaders of the revolt came from precisely the sort of lower-middle-class communities the Florio tax plan was designed to benefit. Pundits and politicians wasted much ink trying to figure out why, yet historically the answer is rather simple. Suburban homeowners in New Jersey were outraged *as a class*; they had come to regard certain privileges to be theirs by custom and right. One privilege was the right to rule their municipal fiefdoms in near-total autonomy while another was the freedom to wage war on their neighbors like so many feuding barons. The governor's role in such an arrangement was much like a feudal monarch's, that is, to safeguard the system and interpret the law, in this case the ancient (since 1917, that is) doctrine of home rule. Anything else was subversive to the holy order. Because the lesser nobility (or lower-middle-class homeowners) had more proportionally invested in the system, they were the ones who felt most threatened by rumors of its demise.

From his years in Camden, where he'd gotten his start battling the Democratic machine of Mayor Angelo Erichetti, Florio had come to recognize that the suburban system was based on the desiccation of urban centers like Camden and Newark and that rather than being self-sufficient, as its inhabitants liked to believe, it actually required greater infusions of state funds than had ever been required by the cities in their prime. Yet Florio was ultimately forced to retreat in the face of unprecedented public outrage. Senator Bill Bradley, who had made his name as a champion of neoliberal federal tax reform, did his best to dodge the explosive question of tax rationalization at the local level and, for his efforts, was nearly toppled by an obscure Republican freeholder named Christine Todd Whitman.

Not that the tax protesters were without a few arguments. One plank in the Florio tax plan, which called for doubling income tax rates (from 3.5 to 7 percent) on earnings in excess of $35,000 a year per individual and $70,000 per household, was an unusually progressive move in a conservative era, even if the cutoff is rather low for a state in which a typical family of four earns more than $60,000 a year. On the other

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hand, the plan's sales tax component, which raised the rate from 6 to 7 percent and removed exemptions for a wide range of household items from toilet paper to beer, was anything but progressive, and, significantly, it was this part of the tax program that drew the most heat.

The Florio plan also suffered from poor timing. Whereas the sales tax increase went into effect immediately, property tax relief to less well-off communities did not kick in until several months later. Even then, residents suspected, not without reason, that whatever savings they might realize would be more than offset by rising tax rates brought on by the recession. The Florio administration also required local districts to begin paying the costs of teacher pensions, adding significantly to the local school burden.

Then there was what might be called the rat-hole problem: the reluctance of middle-class homeowners to pour hundreds of millions of dollars down the drain of supposedly hopeless urban school districts. Questioning whether communities composed of uneducated poor people are capable of running well-funded, up-to-date school systems may reek of racism and elitism, yet only the most starry-eyed advocate of small-scale democracy would offer unqualified assurances that they could. One problem with home rule New Jersey-style is that the quality of administration varies drastically from one municipality to another. Some towns—middle-class suburban ones, mostly—are progressive, efficient, and squeaky clean, the kind of places where earnest young parents spend hours discussing reading programs and math instruction. Others are marked by payoffs and political favoritism, racial conflicts, and the sort of porous accounting that allows millions of dollars to vanish into thin air. Despite well-documented abuses in places like Newark, Trenton, and Paterson, so strong is the prejudice against outside interference that the state has stepped in to assume control in only one extreme instance (Jersey City), and then only after years of hesitation. The Florio administration has vowed to step up monitoring to ensure that its money is well spent, but suburbanites are skeptical. All they know is that cities like Camden have sucked up more and more state money in recent years, yet have continued to careen downhill. Pouring in hundreds of millions more, they contend, is not likely to cause them to change.

They have a point, although suburbs are themselves careening downhill while sucking up more and more state funds. Although there is much the Florio tax plan would do to benefit cities like Camden, there is much it would leave undone. Injecting more than $100 million dollars a year in urban school aid, as the plan would do in Camden, will no doubt help raise educational opportunities for the urban poor. By improving schools and lowering Camden's "confiscatory" property taxes, as one financial consultant to the city put it, it will make Camden and other cities more attractive to developers and homeowners and more competitive with surrounding communities.

On the other hand, it will not slow the suburban ratables race, impose order on chaotic suburban development, reduce dependence on the automobile, or promote high-density, urban-style development, as one high-level Florio adviser readily conceded in a phone interview. Suburban municipal autonomy will remain essentially intact. The school aid program will not bring back the ferries and railroads that once were Camden's lifeblood. Nor will it bring back jobs in heavy industry. Kids who study hard and learn marketable skills will most likely move out of the city. Camden's tax rate will go down, but its tax base will still be minuscule in comparison to its needs, and it will still have to spend more than neighboring communities for fire protection and police. The high crime rate will continue to scare off investors. Camden will still have to spend millions to repair its sewer lines, which were allowed to deteriorate while millions of dollars went to spanking new systems in the suburbs. Barring some miracle of gentrification, Camden will remain a relic of an industrial past.

So what should the state do instead? Rather than the liberal ideal of expanding individual opportunity, a socialist program would take as its starting point the repair, reconstruction, and redesign of social institutions, in this case the city as a unit of industrial production. In contrast to the small-is-beautiful, local-control

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nostrums, it would begin by abolishing the beggar-thy-neighbor system of home rule and centralizing municipal functions at a regional or national level. Local democracy cannot flourish, obviously, without effective leadership at the top, and local communities should not be given carte blanche to strangle their neighbors without at least some broader debate as to the consequences.

A socialist re-urbanization program would also dismantle the system of public subsidies for private consumption that is the core of the suburban system, particularly tax subsidies for home ownership, which disproportionately favor upper-bracket taxpayers with the largest homes, and the myriad subsidies for the private automobile. A little-known study by the Federal Highway Administration ("Final Report on the Federal Highway Cost Allocation Study") in May 1982 found, for instance, that automobiles cost the general public 11.8 cents per vehicle mile for air pollution, congestion-related delays and the like, over and above what motorists paid in gas taxes and highway user fees. In 1990 dollars, the deficit comes to approximately $2.85 per gallon. Other engineers and economists, citing such factors as the market value of urban real estate devoted to roads, highways, and legally mandated parking, the rising cost of highway construction, and the structural damage wrought to surrounding buildings by heavy traffic, peg the total deficit at $4 to $6 per gallon and up for cars and considerably more for heavy trucks. If motorists were required to pick up even a portion of these costs, it would do far more for cities like Newark, Trenton, and Camden than a broad-based sales tax. At $65 per tankful of gas, roughly what French motorists have been paying following the invasion of Kuwait, land-use patterns would alter as thoroughly as they did during suburbanization. Motorists would drive more frugally, and markets would open up for less costly forms of transport, such as trolleys, ferries, trains, and bikes. The pedestrian-oriented downtown business district would become competitive with shopping malls accessible only by car. Transportation efficiency would go up as traffic went down. No longer would Camden be on the periphery. Rather, as a former rail and ferry hub strategically located across from Philadelphia, it would once again find itself at the center of action.

Obviously, a proposal to double or triple gas prices is not "practical" under present circumstances. But the continuation of a suburban system based on subsidized private consumption and deepening public squalor is not practical either. Something's got to give. And, if nothing else, events in Eastern Europe prove that when giant political superstructures do give, they give way with stunning speed.

Constructing Unreality

Meanwhile, fifteen minutes outside of Camden, a group of developers labor mightily to re-invent the wheel. In the newly suburbanized township of Voorhees, they are building a $350 million "mixed-use development" consisting of condos, offices, shops, and restaurants. Known as Main Street at Voorhees, the project is an idealized version of a turn-of-the-century small town, with flower gardens, narrow lanes for strolling, and an outdoor gazebo. "At Main Street, everything's within walking distance," a brochure announces. "It's a town for the nineties," adds John Maguire, the general manager, "where people can take some of the elements of the city and some of the suburbs and try to get the best of both, to try to walk places instead of driving everywhere." In other words, it's a place where middle-class shoppers can pick and choose, fashioning reality along lines outlined by the consumer culture. Everything in Main Street is neat and clean, with no shadows, no social conflict, and no more history than one would find in any other shopping mall. It is definitely not the sort of turn-of-the-century small town where soapbox orators harangue crowds, trolley drivers go on strike, or passengers riot over higher fares. It has no poor people, few nonwhites, and no factories where things are made, as opposed to sold or consumed. Because the entire setup is owned by a single partnership, it also has no local democracy. It is "an asylum for the preservation of illusion," a refuge where people can eat, drink, and be merry without having to produce, take political responsibility, or give a thought to the economic world outside.

Yet Main Street at Voorhees seems to work as

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neither a city nor a suburb. In contrast to the days when Camden's Broadway bustled with life, visitors to the Disneyfied version a few miles to the southeast are sparse. During a visit in late August, a reporter found most of the stores advertising sales, a sure sign of retail malaise. Part of the problem is no doubt due to the recession and the vast oversupply of retail and office space in suburban New Jersey. But part is also due to the enormous roadblocks the system throws in the path of anything resembling genuine urban development. Because there is no "there" there in suburbia, Main Street is not strategically located at a river crossing or harbor but plunked down arbitrarily in the middle of a field, across from a small shopping center. It is tied to the outside world not by train, trolley, or waterway, only by car. Yet such is the tyranny of the automobile that the local construction code requires an astonishing 3,000 square feet of parking for every 1,000 square feet of office space. This is a requirement that drives up costs, rent, and prices while squandering huge portions of prime South Jersey farmland. Setting aside more space for cars than people lowers human intimacy and assures that habitations and workplaces will be overshadowed by parking lots and garages. It undermines whatever cost advantages a city might pose. It reveals the intolerance of the suburban system for alternative forms of human organization; it is an example of how suburbia simply will not let cities be.

dissent

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Carol O'Cleireacain

COSTS OF THE "NEW FEDERALISM"

From Revenue Sharing to Deficit Sharing

Among the economic changes wrought by the 1980s has been a new fiscal relationship between the federal government, on one hand, and the state and local governments, on the other. Ronald Reagan heralded the "New Federalism," which was supposed to consolidate federal grants and free the other levels of government from federal constraints. But the result has been fewer dollars without fewer mandates on cities to serve their citizens in need.

The U.S. Constitution created a federal system of government where responsibilities not expressly designated to the central government were the states'. The states devolved, through home rule arrangements, responsibilities to local governments—counties, cities, school districts, and so on. As greater flows of goods, services, people, and money have tied this national economy together, the fiscal arrangements among these levels of government have become both more complicated and less sensible.

For example, the growth of huge urban areas, which everywhere cross county lines and, in the northeast, cross state lines, mocks rational political and economic decision making. The principal mechanism for county or city-suburban cooperation is through state government—an entity uninterested, at worst, and slow, at best. The cities' and counties' power to tax is dependent upon the states' authority. The only significant tax within the full authority of local government is the property tax, and even that is levied under state constitutional limitations and statutory controls, and is often subject to taxpayer referenda.

Originally, local governments were to provide basic services—police, fire, education, streets, and water—to their resident population. Their focus was not the redistribution of income or wealth. Neither was their role to compensate for the deficiencies in health care, schooling, and training throughout the world or in rural America, the birthplaces of a growing number of their new residents. Yet, that is the role toward which America's cities have evolved, one that they continue to play in the national economy as we approach the next century. In 1989 the ten largest cities welcomed more than half of America's immigrants.

Cities play a pivotal role in the nation's private economy, where they provide work for millions (a large number of whom live elsewhere), are home to major employers, and are ports of entry for foreign goods and capital and ports of exit for American services and tourists. That role is not reflected in either the distribution of political power or the distribution of resources and responsibilities of the public economy. Nor is the fact that fully one-third of Americans live in cities.

Through the years, ad hoc measures have evolved to deal with the strains that urbanization has generated for the political institutions created by an agrarian Constitutional Convention. Within the confines of the Tenth Amendment and the interstate commerce clause, the federal government has, in this century, instituted a number of innovations that sought to better balance the fiscal flows with the actual economic and political responsibilities.

One was the introduction of a federal income

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tax that provides a basic mechanism to redistribute income from rich to poor. Both the tax's progressivity and the responsiveness of its revenues to economic growth demonstrated, through time, that the federal government had a powerful tool not only to repair some of the inequality of the private economy but also to redistribute revenues within the public sector, from the highest level of government to the lowest.

Economic theory supports the practical view that, with the broadest and most responsive tax base and an enforcement span from coast to coast, the national government is in the best position to tax for the provision of public services. There is, of course, a role for local taxes to provide purely local services. But, with a highly mobile population, "purely local" is a shrinking concept. Beyond fire, sanitation, and parks, it is not easy to find services that ultimately do not have "spillover" effects onto nonresidents. The fact that presidential candidates debate education and anticrime policies, which are not federally provided services, demonstrates that most Americans feel at risk if any locality is not properly educating its children and incarcerating criminals.

While the political consensus may be to have services provided at the local level, the economic consensus is that the resources are raised most efficiently at the national level. By the early 1970s this arrangement of responsibility had become known as "Fiscal Federalism." Accepting constitutionally designated political boundaries, economists set about rechanneling revenues down to where the service problems are.

In the late 1960s, new federal spending created a range of specific local programs through specific grants. These ranged across criminal justice, legal services, housing, community health, and education. This money came with restrictions and tight controls. During the Nixon and Ford administrations, "Fiscal Federalism" became more general and less categorical. Major programs were General Revenue Sharing (which had a special short-term antirecession component during the mid-seventies) and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). Most of this money was used to maintain city services or, ultimately, to substitute for local revenues.

Ronald Reagan's "New Federalism" killed "Fiscal Federalism." CETA died in 1981, although the death blow was dealt in the Carter administration. General Revenue Sharing expired in 1987, after a long strangulation. The hallmark of the "New Federalism" was the shift of enforcement responsibility to the states and the elimination of the money altogether. Because Reagan's "New Federalism" came at the same time as a massive cut in personal and business income taxes and a curtailing of their progressivity, the "revenues" in "revenue sharing" were no longer there. The substitution of the "New Federalism" for "Fiscal Federalism" moved state and local governments from revenue sharing to deficit sharing.

What has this meant for America's other governments? *According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, federal aid to state and local governments fell by $34 billion in real terms during the decade of the 1980s. In addition, spending for key "urban" programs, such as community development, employment, and mass transit fell by 72 percent between 1979 and 1989.*

At the same time, federal taxes became less progressive. Following the federal income tax changes of 1986, which broadened the definition of income and thus the tax base, states and cities with progressive income taxes adjusted their tax rates rather than reap a "windfall" increase in revenues that would have flowed through from the federal changes. It appears now that the "windfall" was grossly overestimated (or never happened) and that state and local tax revenues have suffered as a result. While these governments were erroneously paring back their income taxes, their ability to raise sales taxes was seriously restricted by the elimination of federal deductibility and their borrowing costs were raised through federal restrictions on the use of tax-exempt bonds.

To bring home the specific effects of the "New Federalism," let me use America's largest city, New York, as an example. Federal aid has been a significant source of revenue for New York over the past two decades. It was

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used during the city's fiscal crisis of the mid-to late 1970s to fund basic city services, including police and fire protection. By the time of Reagan's inauguration, when the federal commitment to state and local governments had already peaked, one out of every five dollars New York City raised came from the federal government.

Ten years later, at the time of David Dinkins's inauguration as the city's first African-American mayor, only one dollar out of ten that New York City raised came from the federal government. *The cumulative loss of federal aid to New York City over the decade has been $15.4 billion.* Of course, that was not the only change. During those ten years, the wealth of the top 1 percent of Americans nearly doubled while the poorest lost nearly 15 percent of their income. The federal government's budget priorities shifted from spending seven dollars on the military for every dollar spent on housing to now spending forty-six dollars on the military for every dollar spent on housing.

New York City and New York State have worked to replace much, although not all, of that money. The city has provided roughly 67 cents and the state 33 cents of every dollar of federal aid replaced. The city's booming financial and real estate economy and considerable borrowing made the replacement of federal revenues possible. But with the current recession, that option has ended.

If the federal government were today providing the level of aid to New York City that it provided when Ronald Reagan took office, New York City would have about $2.5 billion more revenue in this fiscal year. That is enough money to fund the entire police, housing, health, aging, and youth services departments combined. The opportunity cost of the "New Federalism" in New York City, then, is the rising infant mortality rate, overflowing hospital emergency rooms, seven-month waiting lists for drug treatment, and doubling up of families throughout the public housing system.

Nor is the situation improving during the Bush administration. The recent federal deficit-reduction package capped domestic spending for the next five years, set limits on the deductibility of all state and local taxes from federal taxes, encroached on traditional state and local revenue sources by raising tobacco and alcohol taxes, raised gasoline taxes while diverting some of those receipts from highways, and mandated Social Security payroll taxes for state and local government workers. As the federal government searches to reduce its deficit, all levels of government recognize this truth: while we have many a multilayered government, there is, ultimately, only one layer of taxpayers.

State and local governments, aware of the federal deficit and the state of the economy, have launched their counterattack. They are demanding "mandate relief." Mandates are the list of federal requirements, qualifications, prohibitions, specifications, constraints, and controls on specific types of state and local spending. Originally many of these mandates were attached to federal aid. Many of them are still attached by states. Their elimination would not directly hit the federal budget. It would, however, eliminate much uniformity. From the point of view of hard-pressed cities and states, the logic of the argument is inescapable. If the federal government isn't paying the piper, why is it still calling the tune? □

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Cynthia M. Duncan

STAGNATION IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Over the last decade poor young adults in rural areas have not been finding enough work to support themselves. Federal social programs are an important buffer: food stamps, Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Head Start, and job training programs are critical to their survival.

We know that changes in the structure of the economy have had powerful negative effects on young people in the inner cities. The same is true in remote rural areas. *The poverty rate for young people in rural areas has more than doubled over the last decade, from 17 percent in 1978 to 36 percent in 1987.* Jobs for those with limited skills and education are no longer available. Young people who do not have the resources to adjust to the new labor market become trapped in declining communities.

Finding good, steady work in remote rural areas has been hard for decades. Those determined to stay in these communities would piece together a livelihood through a combination of seasonal employment, small businesses, odd jobs, and often some public assistance. Those who wanted economic security or mobility moved to the city to find jobs.

After World War II an increased exodus to city jobs brought a dramatic decline in rural poverty, from 22 million in 1950 to 12 million in 1970. Hundreds of thousands of migrants left Appalachia and the rural South during this period. The farm population declined from 17.7 million in 1950 to 5.4 million in 1985. These rural migrants went to jobs in the expanding automobile and steel factories or to construction jobs in growing cities. Between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, a period of national expansion, urban economies could absorb the unemployed and underemployed from rural areas.

When these urban industrial areas began to decline in the late 1970s, rural economies experienced surprising growth for a few years, and there were new employment opportunities. The brief period of revitalization was stimulated by several factors: prices for farm products rose, the OPEC oil embargo spurred growth in domestic energy industries, and manufacturing concerns moved to rural areas, where labor costs were lower.

This rural turnaround was short-lived. International competition in goods-producing industries hit rural areas hard in the early 1980s. Manufacturing industries—the chief source of rural jobs in the 1960s and 1970s—laid off workers, closed shop, or moved overseas. Farm-dependent communities suffered as farmers' debt increased and income dropped.

The rural downturn that began in the early 1980s is now widely accepted as a structural, rather than cyclical, change in the national economy. The goods-producing industries that offered unskilled, high-school-educated young workers stable jobs and upward mobility in past decades are no longer a source of employment growth. Service industries that offer steady employment require workers with more education, and they tend to be located in growing suburban areas, not remote rural or dense urban communities. Rural areas, like inner cities, appear to have intractable high unemployment and high poverty. In both areas young people have been hit the hardest.

High unemployment, poverty and dependency, out-of-wedlock births, and crime in the inner cities have received much attention. Depressed rural communities face many of the same problems. As William J. Wilson has pointed out, when a community's economy declines and middle-income workers begin to

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move away, institutions that shape the future, like schools, libraries, and local papers, also deteriorate. Rigid distinctions on the basis of class and ethnic background have oppressed many rural people for generations. Poor rural communities tend to have two social classes—those who have control and those who are vulnerable to that control, the haves and the have-nots. When times are hard in the national economy, poor people in remote areas become even more isolated as the social fabric unravels, undermining both the will and the means to provide the public goods on which the poor depend.

In small communities where the labor market is tight, getting a job generally depends on family members' reputations for being "good workers" and "not making trouble." Employers can select those known to be reliable and docile and reject those who have sought change in the community.

Public-sector jobs are often part of an entrenched patronage system, doled out to political supporters. Powerful elites often have control over jobs in the private sector as well. This power that comes with control over jobs means that you cannot challenge the local elite or their policies without risking the loss of your own job. Running unsuccessfully against a corrupt school board in Appalachia to bring about reforms means your daughter and nephew are likely to lose their jobs in the kitchen or classroom.

In contrast, poor young people in more diverse communities tend to use public programs and networks to pave their way into the work force, making up for their family's inability to help them do so. The local politics and rigid stratification in chronically depressed places undermine even those public-sector opportunities.

The national welfare system and unemployment programs protect poor people living on the margin in these communities, but they also subsidize rural industries and employers. Wages can be too low to live on, hours too few to count on, and jobs expanding and contracting with the volatile movement of markets far from these communities. But people can stay and survive and be available as workers because of food stamps, AFDC, Medicaid, and unemployment benefits.

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Even as the local elite depends on these programs to keep the work force going, it criticizes the poor for accepting public assistance. It blames the families and the "culture" for social problems, not the economy, and the stigma is one more source of tension for those receiving assistance.

Social welfare programs play a large role in these poor communities, providing support for the poor and subsidizing industries that depend on low wages and seasonal labor. But they also represent another source of social control for local elites. In Appalachia it is certain families who are known to "deliver" certain hollers or families for the politicians, in the Delta it's those blacks who go along with the system, "the Toms." Their children get the summer jobs, the special training a new program offers, a special scholarship.

When everything necessary for a good life is scarce—jobs, housing, clothing, transportation—individual anxiety eats away at civic generosity. With no middle class to act as a bridge between the wealthy and the poor, the community is sharply divided and the poor are left isolated in a world of tension, failure, and dependency.

It is harder to be poor in poor communities. The rural poor are living in concentrated poverty, much like that of the inner cities. Those who are poor in communities with more diverse economies are not as likely to be assigned permanent places at the bottom of the social structure, and they benefit when there is a middle class that invests in public goods like schools, parks, youth programs, local transportation, and child care. Without a steadily working blue-collar middle class, remote rural communities become fiefdoms of small, powerful elites. The rigid stratification system means there is no public-sector investment that buffers the inequalities. The elites and upper-middle class look out for themselves, while those dependent on their largess make do with poorly funded schools and a lack of public goods.

This appears to confirm findings of researchers that those poor who can escape poverty areas are more likely to escape poverty itself. Poor young people who move from the depressed inner-city neighborhoods to communities with more workers and better schools do better in school and work. Expectations, like class boundaries, are less rigid, and those from poor families can improve themselves. In poor rural communities this is not the case, and those from poor families move up only by moving out.

This means that we need to provide more comprehensive federal programs to make up for the lack of private opportunities and to overcome the oppression of the local "public" sector or political structure.

Federal social programs, especially in education and training, have made a difference in the past and would make a difference now for these poor young adults. They need skills and work. Economists forecast labor shortages in the future, and many argue for increased immigration of skilled workers. But we have those potential workers here in our depressed communities and need to commit resources for their sake, the sake of their children, and for the country's future. □

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Lawrence Mishel and David M. Frankel

HARD TIMES FOR WORKING AMERICA

Facts You Ought to Know

In the last half of the 1980s questions began to be raised about income and wages in the U.S. economy. Who was benefiting from Reaganomics? Was the economy producing a disproportionate number of low-wage jobs? Was the middle class shrinking? This is an appropriate time to reexamine these issues. (See our *The State of Working America*, M. E. Sharpe, 1991, from which this article is taken.) The rise in unemployment in 1990 marks the end of the 1980s recovery, allowing us to compare trends in the 1979-to-1989 business cycle to those of prior cycles.*

What Happened?

Slow Income Growth: By any measure the growth of income in the 1980s was minimal and far less than that of the 1970s, 1960s, or 1950s. For instance, median family income grew by just 0.4 percent per year between 1979 and 1989, a rate half that of the 1973-to-1979 period. In fact, the $1,369 growth in median family income over the ten years after 1979 equalled the amount that incomes rose every twenty months in the 1967–1973 period.

Wealth Accumulation: Household net worth also grew more slowly over the last ten years than in previous business cycles. The exception is that financial assets per household (those yielding a monetary return) grew at a historically high rate, reflecting the boom in the stock market and high real interest rates. On the other hand, the types of wealth held by the nonrich (tangible assets such as durable goods and housing) grew only 0.6 percent annually over the last ten years, a rate far less than the 3.9 percent annual growth that prevailed throughout the 1947-to-1979 period. The consequence was a rise in the maldistribution of wealth. In fact, our estimate is that the net worth of the average household in the bottom 90 percent actually fell 9 percent from 1979 to 1989 while the net worth of the upper 1 percent grew roughly 6 percent.

Rising Inequality: Of course, some people did benefit greatly from recent economic policy. The richest 1 percent did exceedingly well, as reflected in their 74 percent pretax and 86 percent after-tax income growth from 1980 to 1990. Meanwhile, the after-tax income of the bottom 40 percent fell. This dramatic disparity has created the highest level of income inequality in the postwar period, reversing several decades of progress, and has left us with a poverty rate in 1989 (at the end of the recovery!) that surpassed that of any year in the 1970s. Between 1979 and 1989 the shares of income accruing to each of the bottom four-fifths declined, with the increase in the income share of the top fifth primarily rising among the upper 5 percent.

Jobs and Underemployment: The unemployment rate in 1989 was roughly the same as in the prior business cycle peak. All the other indicators of labor-market performance, how-

* All of our comparisons, adjusted for inflation, use the Bureau of Economic Analysis's personal consumption expenditure (fixed-weight) index to avoid the debatable charge that the official consumer price index overstated inflation in the period prior to 1983. Our analysis (unless noted otherwise) relies on comparisons of data for the cyclical peak, or low-unemployment, years of 1947, 1967, 1973, 1979, and 1989 (or the latest year for which data are available).

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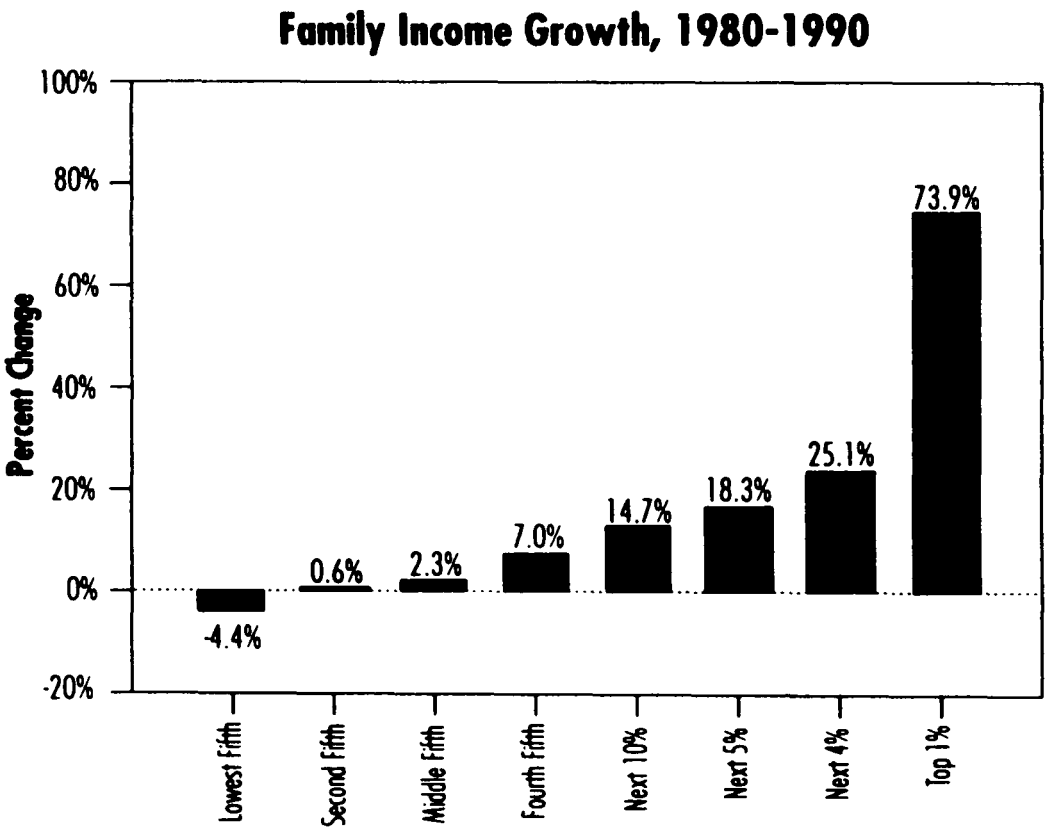

ever, showed drastic deterioration in the eighties. By the end of the decade, underemployment had grown, as millions of people who wanted full-time or permanent work held part-time or temporary jobs. Millions more were working at two or more jobs because their first ones paid so poorly.

Wages: Real hourly wages dropped by 9.3 percent between 1980 and 1989. Fringe benefits fell even more, by 13.8 percent. In 1987, 31.5 percent of the work force was earning poverty level wages, up from 25.7 percent in 1979. This shift toward low-wage employment occurred in every demographic group: among men as well as women; among whites, blacks, and Hispanics; and among workers of all ages. However, the biggest losers were the 75 percent of the work force without college degrees, particularly men (especially black men) and young workers. The wage of a young male high school graduate in 1987 was 18 percent lower than that of a comparable worker in 1979. The hourly wage of young black men (aged 25–34) fell 22 percent between 1979 and 1987.

The Future: There is no reason to expect a reversal of these trends. Real wages have fallen in each of the last four years of recovery. With a recession at hand, it is unlikely that wage growth will be any better in the near future. Nor will the mix of jobs become more upscale in the 1990s: Bureau of Labor Statistics predictions suggest that the skill and education requirements of jobs are expected to grow more slowly in the 1990s than in the 1970s and 1980s.

Why Did These Events Occur?

Now that the decade is over, it is becoming clearer what has and what has not caused these disappointing developments.

The Importance of Wages: Because wages provide the bulk of most families' incomes, the recent fall in real wages has placed severe

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economic pressure on most families. "Working harder for less" has been a necessary requirement for families to improve or hold on to their standard of living. Among married couples with children, for instance, the bottom four-fifths would have had lower incomes in 1987 than in 1979 if the women in these families had not increased their earnings (primarily by entering the paid labor force and working more hours).

Productivity and Wage Growth: Slow productivity growth can only partly explain the slow wage growth of the 1980s. After all, compared to the 1970s, productivity grew slightly faster while real wages *fell* faster in the 1980s. The reasons are that there has been a shift of income from wages to capital income and there has been an erosion of worker bargaining power, both union and nonunion, including an erosion of the minimum wage.

Capital Income: A major factor fueling the tremendous income growth among the rich has been the fast growth of capital income such as interest, dividends, and capital gains. In fact, capital incomes grew three times as fast as labor incomes in the 1980s. As a result, the 1980s were the first decade in the postwar period where labor's share of income fell while capital's share of income rose.

A Shifting Wage Structure: The dramatic fall in the wages of young and non–college-educated workers is primarily the result of a change in the distribution of wages. Simply put, it has become increasingly hard for a worker without a college degree to earn a middle-class standard of living. This is very troubling because three-fourths of today's work force (even those 25 to 34 years old) have not completed college and even by the year 2000 at least 70 percent of the work force will not be college graduates.

Trade and Deindustrialization: It is precisely those groups of workers who have been adversely affected by increased import competition and the decline of manufacturing that have experienced the greatest deterioration in wages. The pressures on manufacturing wages and the displacement of millions of jobs in manufacturing and related industries have lowered the wages of all non–college-educated workers, particularly men. The overall shift of employment from high paying to low paying industries reduced average hourly compensation by 0.5 percent each year in the 1980s.

Taxes: The shifting of the tax burden from the very rich to everyone else compounded the problems stemming from more unequal *market* incomes. This redistribution of the tax burden saved the families in the upper 1 percent more than $25,000 per family each year while adding to the tax payments of nearly everybody else. The changes in the tax structure, however, are not the major reason for rising inequality. For instance, only about one-fourth of the increase in the income share of the upper 1 percent can be ascribed to tax changes. The remainder is due to a growing inequality of wage and capital income.

Poverty and Race: A new mythology about poverty has emerged that equates the growth in poverty to growth in an underclass that is primarily black and in female-headed households. The increase in poverty is then said to be due to the growth of this part of the population, not to economic factors. But *the higher poverty in the 1980s has occurred primarily among whites—the black poverty rate was about the same in 1979 and 1989—and among two-parent and male-headed families*. Even among poor female-headed families, whites make up more than half of the population and have been the fastest growing component of this type of poverty. Moreover, only one out of five female family heads is a "never married" mother; most female family heads are widowed or divorced. The major question raised by poverty among female-headed families is, "Why does a woman have to have access to a man's income to avoid poverty?" The truly powerful explanations of the growth in poverty in the 1980s are centered in the sizable reductions in government assistance and the growth of poverty-wage jobs.

The Implications

1. By the fundamental measure of real incomes, Reaganomics (upward redistribution of income, deregulation, unregulated import competition, lowering of the economic safety net)

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was not a success: people are working more at lower wages. New policies will be needed if the erosion of living standards is to be reversed in the 1990s.

2. Reversing these income trends will require halting the erosion of competitiveness and the shrinkage of our industrial base. The job opportunities in manufacturing and related industries make up about a third of all private-sector jobs and are a key to the ability of a broad segment of our population—the non–college-educated work force—to earn middle-class incomes. The United States is unlikely to be able to offer good-paying jobs requiring a college degree to more than a small minority of the work force for the foreseeable future.

3. To raise the standard of living of American workers also requires raising the wage levels of our service economy, where the majority work. Service-sector wages in the United States are far less than the average wage, a situation not true in most competitor countries. Raising minimum wages, eliminating government hostility to unionization, and extending fringe benefits to part-time and temporary workers are some of the strategies needed to raise service-sector pay and thus provide incentives for new investment and productivity.

4. We must enhance a family's ability to have more family members working while also raising children. Better support for quality, affordable child care and parental-leave rights are an important starting point.

5. Poverty grew over the 1980s even though incomes grew, albeit slowly. Higher wages will help reduce poverty but not eliminate it. A more generous and restructured social policy is needed as well.

6. To generate greater economic growth we will have to close the "third deficit"—the deficit in public investment in infrastructure and in our work force's training and education. □

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Russell Jacoby

THE GREENING OF THE UNIVERSITY

From Ivory Tower to Industrial Park

Remember when the university was called an "ivory tower"? Bookish college presidents? Absentminded professors? Befuddled students? These types belong to a distant, perhaps mythic, past. Today no one charges that college presidents are too scholarly, that professors wander about in a fog, or that students know nothing about the "real world."

More than quaint images have faded; the reality that sustains them crumbles. Many believe it is fine, that the version (and vision) of higher education as an ethereal retreat deserves a death sentence. Universities, retooled, are now plugged in. Yet it's hardly news that all is not well on campuses. Students are not learning, teachers not teaching, college presidents not presiding.

What's different now? It may be this: the remedy is the ailment. News of a faltering American economy permeates the culture. Every day we hear that the world rejects American goods as too expensive and shoddy; Americans prefer Japanese cars or German coffee grinders. A cry to make America competitive echoes through the land. All concur that the university should play a role in this "mission"; its research and knowledge could make America hum again.

Yet to propose that universities directly abet American enterprise may be subversive—subverting education. Study and reflection require distance from the daily pressure of jobs, dollars, and family life. While this distance is always incomplete, sometimes nonexistent, still, learning depends on social insulation, a chance to blast through sedimented routine: reading through the night, ruminating in the day, and ignoring the obligations that saddle most of us. Thinking needs—yes!—an ivory tower; today the university is more like an industrial park.

* * *

I'm standing in the entrance hall of a UCLA building; the winter holidays are fast approaching. Outside, the scene resembles the fantasy of American higher education; students loll about in the sun, studying for exams. Inside, it is all business. Next to several crinkly "Season's Greetings" is posted a "Making Money Work" clipping on investing prospects. The main display case features a new book with no indication whether its author is a faculty member, a campus speaker, or just a hero. A stack of Lester Korn's The Success Profile *greets students, promising an "understanding" of "the six-figure profile" and the art of "selling oneself." Down the hall a career placement office shelves loose-leaf binders stuffed with resumés and corporate information. Upstairs the Executive Program (and its Executive Lobby) offers pricey courses for senior management on competition in a global environment.*

* * *

Indignation, even surprise, would be misplaced; after all, this is the school of management and business. Ever since Joseph Wharton gave $100,000 to the University of Pennsylvania, business schools have proliferated. The issue is not business schools, but the business takeover of medicine, humanities, and social sciences. Even this misleads, as if hostile buyouts or takeovers multiply. Not true. Administrators, faculty, students have become market enthusiasts. University presidents look

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like bankers, professors like loan officers; course offerings resemble managerial training programs.

Americans have long been suspicious of useless learning. "Course I'd never admit it publicly," confessed Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt to his son Ted, "fellow like myself, State U. graduate, it's only decent and patriotic for him to blow his horn and boost the Alma Mater—but as a smatter of fact, there's a whole lot of valuable time lost even at the U., studying poetry and French and subjects that never brought in anybody a cent."

New or old, the problem is this: too much practicality is impractical. Vocational education has always flirted with this danger; teaching specific skills may render a student useless when the job changes, as it always does. Students mastering desk typewriters lengthen unemployment lines. "Secretary," reads a typical classified, "xlnt opportunity . . . WordPerf & Lotus. . . ." A broader education—pure math as well as pure history—is necessary not simply because it makes for an informed population but a more skilled labor force—more inventive, flexible, thoughtful.

An instrumental education did not arise overnight. Especially in the last fifty years the universities entered the big league; they own vast tracts of real estate; employ millions; spend billions; and strike deals with major corporations.

Harvard commands a four billion dollar endowment, which is a lot of coin to play with—and Harvard plays. Analysts of Wall Street instability indict program trading and index arbitrage; this is where computer-driven stocks flit about taking advantage of slight price fluctuations, a Harvard pastime for a number of years. The financial clout of some schools has not been completely ignored: the antitrust division of the Justice Department has opened a new price-fixing investigation. The target? Elite universities. The issue? Collusion on tuition and financial aid. The *Wall Street Journal* concluded that "the Ivy League schools are part of a price-fixing system that OPEC might envy."

As with many corporations, the university's greatest customer is the federal government. Until World War II, Washington paid little attention or money to universities except for agricultural research. In 1940 American universities spent a total of 30 million dollars for scientific research. Forty years later, spurred by hot and cold wars, federal funds for university research exceeded three billion dollars. The money gushed forth; in constant dollars Washington's commitment to research grew 12 to 14 percent a year, but the party ended in the seventies when increases dwindled to zero.

After the festivities everyone drove home in their Japanese cars—and sobered up watching Japanese-built televisions or VCRs or exercised with Japanese "Walkmen." At first it seemed like a passing nervousness. An immense trade deficit beset the United States. The anxiety worsened; American self-confidence suffered. American goods were lousy; no one wanted them. The know-how, the prowess, and the competitive ethos that signified America—what happened? Today the best-selling car in the United States is Japanese. Once upon a time "Made in Japan" spelled junk.

Washington pared its university funding as Japanese nightmares visited corporate executives. With federal blessing, the universities and corporations found solace in each other. The corporations tapped into the knowledge they desperately needed; and the universities received support for their big-ticket labs and star faculties. The American public loved "cold fusion," since its materials cost about $150, but most research projects need pricier equipment. A high-resolution gas chromatography maspectrometer—a must for big universities—costs about $600,000; and recruiting high-profile faculty requires big bucks. The University of Washington put together a 2.3 million-dollar package, which includes labs, to snare one biochemist; Stanford came up with a million for one physicist.

Newspapers report anxiety-provoking, if unfathomable, findings: the United States lost the lead in major technological innovations or "the patent balance" turned negative. The remedy? Better science, research, training. "It is clear," states Robert M. Rosenzweig, president of the Association of American Universities, "that many thoughtful people are beginning to place their hopes for improve-

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ments in the competitive position of American business and in the health of university-based science in the growing collaboration between business and universities."

Groups promoting rapport between business and higher education proliferate. In 1978 about eighty universities and multinational corporations set up the Business–Higher Education Forum, perhaps the most important of the new outfits. The Forum describes itself as "created for the express purpose of . . . acting on issues shared jointly by American business and the nation's higher education institutions." Sheila Slaughter, a University of Arizona professor, who has studied the Business–Higher Education Forum, concludes in her book (*The Higher Learning and High Technology*) that education or teaching hardly matters to this outfit; the Forum simply wants more resources devoted to commercial research.

It's happening. Since 1974, when Harvard signed a twelve-year, twenty-three million dollar contract for basic cell research with Monsanto, corporate-academic compacts have prospered. In 1982 Harvard's teaching hospital, Massachusetts General, entered a seventy million dollar contract with A.G. Hoechst, a West German chemical corporation; by 1989 Mass General held over forty major corporate contracts. Exxon funded MIT eight million dollars for research in combustion. Yale, Washington University, and other schools struck corporate deals. Cornell established a Biotechnology Institute supported by Eastman Kodak, General Foods, and Union Carbide. Washington University signed a $23.5 million contract with Monsanto giving the chemical company complete access to the university's School of Medicine. As the Monsanto director of corporate research stated, "If we wanted to build up our research staff in-house we would have to hire people that would lead us to concepts superior to our competitors. Washington U's medical school is an intellectual resource we couldn't hire." But they did.

In addition to these highly visible agreements, other university-corporate relations multiply. MIT boasts an industrial liaison program to which some three hundred corporations subscribe; for a fee MIT provides access to professors and their research before publication. The university exults that the program, which publishes a fat catalog of listings, places "at disposal of industry the expertise and resources of all the schools, departments, centers and laboratories of MIT."

Links between corporations and individual faculty also thrive. In fields like molecular biology, corporate affiliation, which can take the form of stocks or part ownership, has become the norm. Individuals are simultaneously full-time professors and company vice presidents or chairmen. "Understandably, the scientists that provided the ideas, techniques and practitioners of genetic chemistry," commented Arthur Kornberg, a Stanford Nobel laureate, "are reluctant to be excluded from its financial rewards." Some have done quite well. Paul Berg, a Stanford University molecular biologist, founded DNAX, which Schering-Plough purchased for twenty-nine million dollars. James S. Fairweather, a Pennsylvania State professor who studies industrial-corporate links, comments that formerly faculty debated "whether they should be involved with industry. Now the issue is what percentage they should get."

If none of this signifies the end of civilization, it denotes the erosion of liberal education. In the same way as American industry may suffer from too much profit making and too few reinvestments, American education may suffer from a surfeit of business, a dearth of learning-for-itself. Do corporate contracts and contacts mean a slackening commitment to education? Perhaps some college presidents might explain.

They're not all speaking at once. With one or two exceptions they do not intervene forcefully on educational issues. As Douglas Greenberg, a vice president of the American Council of Learned Societies, observes, this may be due to the fact they are not "educational leaders" but managers, lawyers, and accountants occupied with endowments, corporate deals, and cash flow.

Formerly, college presidents espoused an educational philosophy and reached the top by teaching or scholarship. W. H. Cowley, a historian of higher education, called the period

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of 1870–1910 the "Age of Titans," when strong presidents like Andrew Dickson White at Cornell, Charles W. Eliot at Harvard, Daniel Coit Gilman at Johns Hopkins, and William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago, built their institutions. They were more than administrators and fund-raisers. "To a man," writes Cowley, "they studied higher educational history, observed European practices first-hand, and proposed plans for meeting the rapidly changing educational requirements of the nation. In the best sense, they became social prophets."

No more. Of course, college presidents have always been tempting targets for critics. Seventy years ago Randolph Bourne satirized Columbia's President Butler as President Butcher, a front man for conservative financial interests. Compared to those who came after him, however, Butler appears as a committed educator.

Today college presidents are becoming indistinguishable from CEOs. Steven Muller, president of Johns Hopkins, agrees with those who wonder, "Where are the great college presidents today?" He laments that "none of us is a great leader, none the present voice or conscience or inspiration of higher learning." But Muller offers a reason: size and complexity of the university. Today's university compares to yesterday's as an aircraft carrier to a sailboat; the predecessors knew or thought they understood everything at their schools. This is no longer possible. "We lack the dash and daring of a single skipper at the helm; instead we pace the automated captains's bridge of an ocean liner."

Perhaps, but we know from oil tankers that run aground or navy warships that shoot down civilian jets that large crafts also need decisive and alert leaders. Who is running the outfit and where is it heading? Numerous college presidents sit on the boards of major corporations. To whom do they answer? Where are their commitments? For instance, Hannah Grey, president of the University of Chicago, is on the board of directors of ARCO, as well as J. P. Morgan and Morgan Guaranty Trust. Is she discussing course offerings or falling SAT scores with other board members? What does it mean for the university if contractual agreements are held with profit-making corporations? With many of these deals, the commercial applications expressly guide research.

In a new book, *How Harvard Rules,* John Trumpbour reports that Harvard's Mass General Hospital signed its largest contract with a Japanese corporation establishing "a 100-member staff Cutaneous Biology Research Center dedicated to researching the production of anti-wrinkle creams, sun tanning lotions, and baldness cures." He cites a Harvard spokesman lauding the contract inasmuch as both the university and Japan's Shiseido Corporation seek to provide "symptom-free normal skin of pleasing appearance." So much for the search for truth.

Moreover, these contacts often gut the free circulation of knowledge, essential to higher learning. The Monsanto contract with Washington University contains a secrecy clause; Monsanto can delay publication of its university-sponsored research for years. Such clauses are standard in corporate-funded university research.

The proliferating contracts raise a troubling question: are public resources subsidizing private gain? Although corporate largess for academic research increases, the federal government still bankrolls the largest share. On average, Washington pays for over 60 percent of university research—and sometimes much more, like 86 percent of the MIT research budget. This financial support renders all universities public institutions, argues David Noble, a member of a Nader group, Coalition for Universities in the Public Interest. Inasmuch as universities accept substantial federal funds, they are public—and should be accountable to the public.

If this is the case, why should corporations paying only a small portion of research costs walk off with exclusive licensing agreements? Taxpayers pay for most of the laboratories, buildings, and salaries, but the monies earned go to private corporations. In several cases, after developing a drug with federal funds, a faculty member founded a company to market

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it. To add insult to injury, foreign corporations already outperforming U.S. companies benefit from the federal research.

Paul Gray, the president of MIT, touted the "Industrial Liaison Program" as an example of a program making America competitive. Sounds good, but a House subcommittee chaired by Representative Ted Weiss discovered that 45 percent of the subscribers to the program are foreign, largely Japanese, companies; and 80 percent of the faculty with the largest federal grants advise foreign corporations. MIT even has a Tokyo office facilitating the sale of its research. Making America more competitive? Federal research, commented Weiss, "is being sold to foreign companies at bargain prices."

The real issue may elude the numbers on contracts, profits, and deals. What is the impact of these corporate arrangements on university life, especially on undergraduate teaching? To what extent is the "ivory tower" turning into an industrial or research "park"? A thousand studies have confirmed the decay of university instruction, a thousand committees have solemnly reaffirmed its importance, and nothing changes. Corporations have little or no interest in undergraduate instruction; neither do many professors. Their promotions and salaries depend on wider professional reputation, which in turn depends on publications, conferences, disciplinary activities. Inspired teaching does not travel well; it cannot be counted or appraised.

In a new book, *The Moral Collapse of the University,* Bruce Wilshire, a Rutgers University professor, estimates that teaching counts at most for one-twentieth of a tenure outcome (the decision whether to hire a faculty member permanently). To be known as an effective teacher can even damage a career, as it may imply a scientific laxness or excessive interest in students. The 1986 and 1987 winners of Harvard's Levenson Award for Outstanding Teaching were both denied tenure. The story is the same elsewhere. Recognition for outstanding teaching is such a stigma that one young nominee begged not to be considered; she was afraid the honor would impede her career.

Several studies conclude that faculty in high-demand technical fields spend too little time with students; the Hoechst–Mass General Hospital contract, for instance, specifies that participating faculty members must largely devote their time to research. MIT codified a system encouraging professorial cooperation with its industrial liaison program. Depending on the extent of contact, faculty receive points worth financial perks. Talk on the telephone to a corporation? Two points. Meet on campus with a company? More than two. Visit a corporation? Twelve. Meet with students? Go directly to jail. "The universities are getting out of education just like US Steel got out of steel," concludes David Noble. "There's more money elsewhere."

Pressure to publish accelerates the decline of teaching. Careers are made by grants, recognition, and publications. Even the *New York Times* offered that it was not "philistine" to wonder whether the 215 scholarly articles on John Milton, 132 on Henry James and 554 on William Shakespeare that were published in 1987 were all important or necessary. Did they all advance knowledge? Doubtful, since most will go unread—and are intended only to be listed and indexed.

Censorship is hardly the remedy; no one wants to say—no one can say—that the 554th article on Shakespeare should not be published; it may spark some insights—now, or in fifty years. This undeniable truth, however, can also be an excuse; it avoids recognizing that universities are abandoning undergraduates, relinquishing unprofitable teaching and reflection.

At the risk of nostalgia: as undergraduates a millennium ago we revered one professor for his rambling lectures and brilliant conversation. However, he flunked daily life. He had to be driven about, and during seminars he covered himself with cigarette ashes unless we interposed an ashtray. He hardly published or hobnobbed with colleagues. His only virtue? He taught and inspired generations of students. Today he'd probably be homeless.

Conservatives have rightly sensed something has gone amuck in higher education; they have wrongly indicted the faculty or "relativism" or rock 'n' roll without looking at the larger

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picture. No one reading Plato nowadays? Professor Allan Bloom tells us why in *The Closing of the American Mind*. Wimpy faculty cater to hang-loose undergraduates who prefer pottery classes to Aristotle; it's time, he counsels, to get tough with these kids and give 'em the classics.

Sounds good, but is it true? Bloom hardly alludes to a vast shift in student preferences, a rush to escape the humanities he cherishes. In a fifteen-year period, business and management majors have doubled, mainly at the expense of history, philosophy, and English. In 1985, out of almost one million bachelors' degrees awarded, one-quarter, or 230,000 students, received B.A.s in business and management—compared to 6,000 in philosophy and religion. We have a zillion students—new crops graduate each year—adept at spreadsheets and risk management and fewer and fewer who know something of the Middle East or even American literature.

Of course, the mercenary impulse among students is not new—or simply evil. A century ago when Henry Adams, scion of presidents, asked students what they could do with their education, he was told, "The degree of Harvard College is worth money to me in Chicago." Still, these students were taking Adams's course in medieval history, not portfolio management or business psychology. Today career imperatives hardly allow nonutilitarian studies. not only the degree itself, but every course, must be subject to cost analysis. How will "Philosophy from Hegel to Nietzsche" look on the application for the bank internship? And the students are applying; at Yale in 1985, out of 1,250 seniors, 400 sought positions at First Boston, the investment banking firm. This outfit, the *New Republic* noted, "worked on the Texaco-Getty deal," where a handful of bankers earned a pleasant $125,000 an hour.

Students have not suddenly become more calculating; it's just that they have heard the news. A major in "American lit" does not spell a job, perhaps not even a credit card. From the University of California, Berkeley comes an illuminating tale. Citibank, American's largest banking company, set up a table on the UC Berkeley campus to sign up graduating seniors for a MasterCard or Visa Card. A sign stated "No Previous Credit History Required." One student, a math major and already a reputable holder of Visa, applied for a MasterCard. However, he had changed majors, from math to rhetoric, and was turned down. Why? His new and nonremunerative field of study. The *Los Angeles Times* discovered that the bank followed its standard procedure. "The bank routinely rejected students who listed majors in the humanities, such as English, history or art. The bank's basic rationale is that these students are less likely to repay debts because they will not land the high-paying jobs that go to business or engineering graduates."

One survey of today's college experience finds little excitement or rebellion; a "grim professionalism" dominates. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, a Smith College historian, reports that students view colleges simply as "a continuation of past study and preparation for professional school." Often they are "the frightened sons and daughters of the middle and upper middle class who fear downward social mobility." As the first generation of children of college-educated parents, they "fear slipping" from the parental economic plane. They go to college not to escape previous lives—a millennium ago, our greatest hope and desire—but to secure them. For this reason, these students remain dependent on their parents; many return home after college, an unexpected phenomenon. Of course, it's cheaper to live at home—and there seems no reason not to. Twenty years ago, however, this would have been unfathomable, no matter the economic justification.

Twenty years ago brings us perilously close to the "sixties." Horowitz tells of a student whose feelings echoed many; her older sister, a veteran of the sixties and a college dropout, works in a bookstore; the husband does odd jobs. For the younger sister, her friends, and the entire family, the moral was evident: conform. Otherwise you might end up shelving books.

* * *

I am teaching a class on twentieth-century America; we finally reach the civil rights

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movement and antiwar protests. In the discussion students allude to older siblings or acquaintances who dropped out and now vegetate in dead-end jobs—if not worse. Like the homeless, these negative examples goad students to keep to the straight and narrow. I ask, "Are these casualties from the sixties people you know? Someone you can talk to or even find? A sister or a parent or an uncle?" Invariably the answer runs, "Well, not really, it's someone I kinda heard about from friends of my parents . . . they were talking about some woman they had heard about . . . but. . . ." A live person never appears. This is odd and instructive; a historical "lesson" is fabricated. Students all "know" the burnt-out, bummed-out, bitter victims of the sixties. They all nod. Yes, indeed. But they don't know them. Their experiences are synthetic, debris from the mass media, vague gossip, distant accounts.

* * *

This "lesson" is passed along, but does it have any validity? Do more casualties date from the sixties than, say, from the fifties—the early heart attacks, suicides, and breakdowns? Or from today? When was the last time a student said, "Well, I don't really want to work for a fast-track New York law firm like my friend's brother; he was pulling down big money—he had it all—and died at 39 playing racquetball. It's death."

Does the future hold a devitalized university? A university geared toward careers, contracts, and antiwrinkle creams? To be sure, the ivory tower was neither ivory nor a tower; yet it afforded a modicum of refuge where faculty and students might think about "big" questions—humanity, social justice, art, the heavens above. Like those people in a party who hardly look at you—they are looking elsewhere for someone flashier—the university may lose its soul as it searches for the action. To be unfashionable, inasmuch as the ivory tower represented a partial insulation from the wider society, we need it more than ever.

We would holler and hoot if our governments—local, state, national—adopted practices of most universities: closed books, secret contracts and deals, confidential decisions on hiring and firing. The major schools, already public by virtue of funding, should be public in other ways; they must divulge how much private consulting and research their faculty does, and what this means for teaching and education. They must disclose the contracts they hold and the dual and triple positions as educators and directors of corporate boards. They must reveal where the tuition funds go and sources and spending of other monies. We have to watch that American universities do not go the way of American electronics and steel corporations: out of business as they forget their business, education.

A century ago, Daniel Coit Gilman, one of the "titan" college presidents, reflected on the role of the university. "Among the merits of a university," he stated, is "the cultivation of a spirit of repose." He feared that "as the distractions of modern civilization multiply, as newspaper enterprises bring to our daily vision the conflicts and transactions of mankind . . . some corrective must exist, or there will be no more enjoyment in an intellectual life than there is in making money in the turmoil of the bourse." Amen. □

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A Better Vision

Michael Walzer

THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY

A Path to Social Reconstruction

My aim in this essay is to defend a complex, imprecise, and, at crucial points, uncertain account of society and politics. I have no hope of theoretical simplicity, not at this historical moment when so many stable oppositions of political and intellectual life have collapsed; but I also have no desire for simplicity, since a world that theory could fully grasp and neatly explain would not, I suspect, be a pleasant place. In the nature of things, then, my argument won't be elegant, and though I believe that arguments should march, the sentences following one another like soldiers on parade, the route of my march today will be twisting and roundabout. I shall begin with the idea of civil society, recently revived by Central and East European intellectuals, and go on to talk about the state, the economy, and the nation, and then about civil society and the state again. These are the crucial social formations that we inhabit, but we don't at this moment live comfortably in any of them. Nor is it possible to imagine, in accordance with one or another of the great simplifying theories, a way to choose among them—as if we were destined to find, one day, the best social formation. I mean to argue against choosing, but I shall also claim that it is from within civil society that this argument is best understood.

The words "civil society" name the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology—that fill this space. Central and East European dissidence flourished within a highly restricted version of civil society, and the first task of the new democracies created by the dissidents, so we are told, is to rebuild the networks: unions, churches, political parties and movements, cooperatives, neighborhoods, schools of thought, societies for promoting or preventing this and that. In the West, by contrast, we have lived in civil society for many years without knowing it. Or, better, since the Scottish Enlightenment, or since Hegel, the words have been known to the knowers of such things but they have rarely served to focus anyone else's attention. Now writers in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland invite us to think about how this social formation is secured and invigorated.

We have reasons of our own for accepting the invitation. Increasingly, associational life in the "advanced" capitalist and social democratic countries seems at risk. Publicists and preachers warn us of a steady attenuation of everyday cooperation and civic friendship. And this time it's possible that they are not, as they usually are, foolishly alarmist. Our cities really are noisier and nastier than they once were. Familial solidarity, mutual assistance, political likemindedness—all these are less certain and less substantial than they once were. Other people, strangers on the street, seem less trustworthy than they once did. The Hobbesian account of society is more persuasive than it once was.

Perhaps this worrisome picture follows—in

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part, no more, but what else can a political theorist say?—from the fact that we have not thought enough about solidarity and trust or planned for their future. We have been thinking too much about social formations different from, in competition with, civil society. And so we have neglected the networks through which civility is produced and reproduced. Imagine that the following questions were posed one or two centuries ago to political theorists and moral philosophers: what is the preferred setting, the most supportive environment, for the good life? What sorts of institutions should we work for? Nineteenth- and twentieth-century social thought provides four different, by now familiar, answers to these questions. Think of them as four rival ideologies, each with its own claim to completeness and correctness. Each is importantly wrong. Each neglects the necessary pluralism of any civil society. Each is predicated on an assumption I mean to attack: that such questions must receive a singular answer.

Definitions from the Left

I shall begin, since this is for me the best-known ground, with two leftist answers. The first of the two holds that the preferred setting for the good life is the political community, the democratic state, within which we can be citizens: freely engaged, fully committed, decision-making members. And a citizen, on this view, is much the best thing to be. To live well is to be politically active, working with our fellow citizens, collectively determining our common destiny—not for the sake of this or that determination but for the work itself, in which our highest capacities as rational and moral agents find expression. We know ourselves best as persons who propose, debate, and decide.

This argument goes back to the Greeks, but we are most likely to recognize its neoclassical versions. It is Rousseau's argument or the standard leftist interpretation of Rousseau's argument. His understanding of citizenship as moral agency is one of the key sources of democratic idealism. We can see it at work in a liberal such as John Stuart Mill, in whose writings it produced an unexpected defense of syndicalism (what is today called "workers' control") and, more generally, of social democracy. It appeared among nineteenth- and twentieth-century democratic radicals, often with a hard populist edge. It played a part in the reiterated demand for social inclusion by women, workers, blacks, and new immigrants, all of whom based their claims on their capacity as agents. And this same neoclassical idea of citizenship resurfaced in the 1960s in New Left theories of participation, where it was, however, like latter-day revivals of many ideas, highly theoretical and without much local resonance.

Today, perhaps in response to the political disasters of the late sixties, "communitarians" in the United States struggle to give Rousseauian idealism a historical reference, looking back to the early American republic and calling for a renewal of civic virtue. They prescribe citizenship as an antidote to the fragmentation of contemporary society—for these theorists, like Rousseau, are disinclined to value the fragments. In their hands, republicanism is still a simplifying creed. If politics is our highest calling, then we are called away from every other activity (or, every other activity is redefined in political terms); our energies are directed toward policy formation and decision making in the democratic state.

I don't doubt that the active and engaged citizen is an attractive figure—even if some of the activists that we actually meet carrying placards and shouting slogans aren't all that attractive. The most penetrating criticism of this first answer to the question about the good life is not that the life isn't good but that it isn't the "real life" of very many people in the modern world. This is so in two senses. First, though the power of the democratic state has grown enormously, partly (and rightly) in response to the demands of engaged citizens, it can't be said that the state is fully in the hands of its citizens. And the larger it gets, the more it takes over those smaller associations still subject to hands-on control. The rule of the demos is in significant ways illusory; the participation of ordinary men and women in the activities of the state (unless they are state

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employees) is largely vicarious; even party militants are more likely to argue and complain than actually to decide.

Second, despite the singlemindedness of republican ideology, politics rarely engages the full attention of the citizens who are supposed to be its chief protagonists. They have too many other things to worry about. Above all, they have to earn a living. They are more deeply engaged in the economy than in the political community. Republican theorists (like Hannah Arendt) recognize this engagement only as a threat to civic virtue. Economic activity belongs to the realm of necessity, they argue, politics to the realm of freedom. Ideally, citizens should not have to work; they should be served by machines, if not by slaves, so that they can flock to the assemblies and argue with their fellows about affairs of state. In practice, however, work, though it begins in necessity, takes on a value of its own—expressed in commitment to a career, pride in a job well done, a sense of camaraderie in the workplace. All of these are competitive with the values of citizenship.

The second leftist position on the preferred setting for the good life involves a turning away from republican politics and a focus instead on economic activity. We can think of this as the socialist answer to the questions I began with; it can be found in Marx and also, though the arguments are somewhat different, among the utopians he hoped to supersede. For Marx, the preferred setting is the cooperative economy, where we can all be producers—artists (Marx was a romantic), inventors, and artisans. (Assembly-line workers don't quite seem to fit.) This again is much the best thing to be. The picture Marx paints is of creative men and women making useful and beautiful objects, not for the sake of this or that object but for the sake of creativity itself, the highest expression of our "species-being" as *homo faber*, man-the-maker.

The state, in this view, ought to be managed in such a way as to set productivity free. It doesn't matter who the managers are so long as they are committed to this goal and rational in its pursuit. Their work is technically important but not substantively interesting. Once productivity is free, politics simply ceases to engage anyone's attention. Before that time, in the Marxist here and now, political conflict is taken to be the superstructural enactment of economic conflict, and democracy is valued mainly because it enables socialist movements and parties to organize for victory. The value is instrumental and historically specific. A democratic state is the preferred setting not for the good life but for the class struggle; the purpose of the struggle is to win, and victory brings an end to democratic instrumentality. There is no intrinsic value in democracy, no reason to think that politics has, for creatures like us, a permanent attractiveness. When we are all engaged in productive activity, social division and the conflicts it engenders will disappear, and the state, in the once-famous phrase, will "wither away."

In fact, if this vision were ever realized, it is politics that would wither away. Some kind of administrative agency would still be necessary for economic coordination, and it is only a Marxist conceit to refuse to call this agency a state. "Society regulates the general production," Marx wrote in *The German Ideology*, "and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow . . . just as I have a mind." Because this regulation is nonpolitical, the individual producers are freed from the burdens of citizenship. They attend instead to the things they make and to the cooperative relationships they establish. Exactly how one can work with other people and still do whatever one pleases is unclear to me and probably to most other readers of Marx. The texts suggest an extraordinary faith in the virtuosity of the regulators. No one, I think, quite shares this faith today, but something like it helps to explain the tendency of some leftists to see even the liberal and democratic state as an obstacle that has to be, in the worst of recent jargons, "smashed."

The seriousness of Marxist antipolitics is nicely illustrated by Marx's own dislike of syndicalism. What the syndicalists proposed was a neat amalgam of the first and second answers to the question about the good life: for them, the preferred setting was the worker-controlled factory, where men and women were

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simultaneously citizens and producers, making decisions and making things. Marx seems to have regarded the combination as impossible; factories could not be both democratic and productive. This is the point of Engels's little essay on authority, which I take to express Marx's view also. More generally, self-government on the job called into question the legitimacy of "social regulation" or state planning, which alone, Marx thought, could enable individual workers to devote themselves, without distraction, to their work.

But this vision of the cooperative economy is set against an unbelievable background—a nonpolitical state, regulation without conflict, "the administration of things." In every actual experience of socialist politics, the state has moved rapidly into the foreground, and most socialists, in the West at least, have been driven to make their own amalgam of the first and second answers. They call themselves *democratic* socialists, focusing on the state as well as (in fact, much more than) on the economy and doubling the preferred settings for the good life. Because I believe that two are better than one, I take this to be progress. But before I try to suggest what further progress might look like, I need to describe two more ideological answers to the question about the good life, one of them capitalist, the other nationalist. For there is no reason to think that only leftists love singularity.

A Capitalist Definition

The third answer holds that the preferred setting for the good life is the marketplace, where individual men and women, consumers rather than producers, choose among a maximum number of options. The autonomous individual confronting his, and now her, possibilities—this is much the best thing to be. To live well is not to make political decisions or beautiful objects; it is to make personal choices. Not any particular choices, for no choice is substantively the best: it is the activity of choosing that makes for autonomy. And the market within which choices are made, like the socialist economy, largely dispenses with politics; it requires at most a minimal state—not "social regulation," only the police.

Production, too, is free even if it isn't, as in the Marxist vision, freely creative. More important than the producers, however, are the entrepreneurs—heroes of autonomy, consumers of opportunity—who compete to supply whatever all the other consumers want or might be persuaded to want. Entrepreneurial activity tracks consumer preference. Though not without its own excitements, it is mostly instrumental: the aim of all entrepreneurs (and all producers) is to increase their market power, maximize their options. Competing with one another, they maximize everyone else's options too, filling the marketplace with desirable objects. The market is preferred (over the political community and the cooperative economy) because of its fullness. Freedom, in the capitalist view, is a function of plenitude. We can only choose when we have many choices.

It is also true, unhappily, that we can only make effective (rather than merely speculative or wistful) choices when we have resources to dispose of. But people come to the marketplace with radically unequal resources—some with virtually nothing at all. Not everyone can compete successfully in commodity production, and therefore not everyone has access to commodities. Autonomy turns out to be a high-risk value, which many men and women can only realize with help from their friends. The market, however, is not a good setting for mutual assistance, for I cannot help someone else without reducing (for the short term, at least) my own options. And I have no reason, as an autonomous individual, to accept any reductions of any sort for someone else's sake. My argument here is not that autonomy collapses into egotism, only that autonomy in the marketplace provides no support for social solidarity. Despite the successes of capitalist production, the good life of consumer choice is not universally available. Large numbers of people drop out of the market economy or live precariously on its margins.

Partly for this reason, capitalism, like socialism, is highly dependent on state action—not only to prevent theft and enforce

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contracts but also to regulate the economy and guarantee the minimal welfare of its participants. But these participants, insofar as they are market activists, are not active in the state: capitalism in its ideal form, like socialism again, does not make for citizenship. Or, its protagonists conceive of citizenship in economic terms, so that citizens are transformed into autonomous consumers, looking for the party or program that most persuasively promises to strengthen their market positions. They need the state but have no moral relation to it, and they control its officials only as consumers control the producers of commodities, by buying or not buying what they make.

Because the market has no political boundaries, capitalist entrepreneurs also evade official control. They need the state but have no loyalty to it; the profit motive brings them into conflict with democratic regulation. So arms merchants sell the latest military technology to foreign powers, and manufacturers move their factories overseas to escape safety codes or minimum-wage laws. Multinational corporations stand outside (and to some extent against) every political community. They are known only by their brand names, which, unlike family names and country names, evoke preferences but not affections or solidarities.

A Nationalist Response

The fourth answer to the question about the good life can be read as a response to market amorality and disloyalty, though it has, historically, other sources as well. According to the fourth answer, the preferred setting is the nation, within which we are loyal members, bound to one another by ties of blood and history. And a member, secure in membership, literally part of an organic whole—this is much the best thing to be. To live well is to participate with other men and women in remembering, cultivating, and passing on a national heritage. This is so, on the nationalist view, without reference to the specific content of the heritage, so long as it is one's own, a matter of birth, not choice. Every nationalist will, of course, find value in his or her own heritage, but the highest value is not in the finding but in the willing: the firm identification of the individual with a people and a history.

Nationalism has often been a leftist ideology, historically linked to democracy and even to socialism. But it is most characteristically an ideology of the right, for its understanding of membership is ascriptive; it requires no political choices and no activity beyond ritual affirmation. When nations find themselves ruled by foreigners, however, ritual affirmation isn't enough. Then nationalism requires a more heroic loyalty: self-sacrifice in the struggle for national liberation. The capacity of the nation to elicit such sacrifices from its members is proof of the importance of this fourth answer. Individual members seek the good life by seeking autonomy not for themselves but for their people. Ideally, this attitude ought to survive the liberation struggle and provide a foundation for social solidarity and mutual assistance. Perhaps, to some extent, it does: certainly the welfare state has had its greatest successes in ethnically homogeneous countries. It is also true, however, that once liberation has been secured, nationalist men and women are commonly content with a vicarious rather than a practical participation in the community. There is nothing wrong with vicarious participation, on the nationalist view, since the good life is more a matter of identity than activity—faith, not works, so to speak, though both of these are understood in secular terms.

In the modern world, nations commonly seek statehood, for their autonomy will always be at risk if they lack sovereign power. But they don't seek states of any particular kind. No more do they seek economic arrangements of any particular kind. Unlike religious believers who are their close kin and (often) bitter rivals, nationalists are not bound by a body of authoritative law or a set of sacred texts. Beyond liberation, they have no program, only a vague commitment to continue a history, to sustain a "way of life." Their own lives, I suppose, are emotionally intense, but in relation to society and economy this is a dangerously free-floating intensity. In time of trouble, it can readily be turned against other nations, particularly against the internal others: minorities, aliens, strangers. Democratic citizenship, worker solidarity, free enterprise, and

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consumer autonomy—all these are less exclusive than nationalism but not always resistant to its power. The ease with which citizens, workers, and consumers become fervent nationalists is a sign of the inadequacy of the first three answers to the question about the good life. The nature of nationalist fervor signals the inadequacy of the fourth.

Can We Find a Synthesis?

All these answers are wrongheaded because of their singularity. They miss the complexity of human society, the inevitable conflicts of commitment and loyalty. Hence I am uneasy with the idea that there might be a fifth and finally correct answer to the question about the good life. Still, there is a fifth answer, the newest one (it draws upon less central themes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century social thought), which holds that the good life can only be lived in civil society, the realm of fragmentation and struggle but also of concrete and authentic solidarities, where we fulfill E. M. Forster's injunction, "only connect," and become sociable or communal men and women. And this is, of course, much the best thing to be. The picture here is of people freely associating and communicating with one another, forming and reforming groups of all sorts, not for the sake of any particular formation—family, tribe, nation, religion, commune, brotherhood or sisterhood, interest group or ideological movement—but for the sake of sociability itself. For we are by nature social, before we are political or economic beings.

I would rather say that the civil society argument is a corrective to the four ideological accounts of the good life—part denial, part incorporation—rather than a fifth to stand alongside them. It challenges their singularity but it has no singularity of its own. The phrase "social being" describes men and women who are citizens, producers, consumers, members of the nation, and much else besides—and none of these by nature or because it is the best thing to be. The associational life of civil society is the actual ground where all versions of the good are worked out and tested . . . and proved to be partial, incomplete, ultimately unsatisfying. It can't be the case that living on this ground is good in itself; there isn't any other place to live. What is true is that the quality of our political and economic activity and of our national culture is intimately connected to the strength and vitality of our associations.

Ideally, civil society is a setting of settings: all are included, none is preferred. The argument is a liberal version of the four answers, accepting them all, insisting that each leave room for the others, therefore not finally accepting any of them. Liberalism appears here as an anti-ideology, and this is an attractive position in the contemporary world. I shall stress this attractiveness as I try to explain how civil society might actually incorporate and deny the four answers. Later on, however, I shall have to argue that this position too, so genial and benign, has its problems.

Let's begin with the political community and the cooperative economy, taken together. These two leftist versions of the good life systematically undervalued all associations except the demos and the working class. Their protagonists could imagine conflicts between political communities and between classes but not within either; they aimed at the abolition or transcendence of particularism and all its divisions. Theorists of civil society, by contrast, have a more realistic view of communities and economies. They are more accommodating to conflict—that is, to political opposition and economic competition. Associational freedom serves for them to legitimate a set of market relations, though not necessarily the capitalist set. The market, when it is entangled in the network of associations, when the forms of ownership are pluralized, is without doubt the economic formation most consistent with the civil society argument. This same argument also serves to legitimate a kind of state that is liberal and pluralist more than republican (not so radically dependent upon the virtue of its citizens). Indeed, a state of this sort, as we shall see, is necessary if associations are to flourish.

Once incorporated into civil society, neither citizenship nor production can ever again be all-absorbing. They will have their votaries,

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but these people will not be models for the rest of us—or, they will be partial models only, for some people at some time of their lives, not for other people, not at other times. This pluralist perspective follows in part, perhaps, from the lost romance of work, from our experience with the new productive technologies and the growth of the service economy. Service is more easily reconciled with a vision of human beings as social animals than with *homo faber*. What can a hospital attendant or a school teacher or a marriage counselor or a social worker or a television repairperson or a government official be said to *make*? The contemporary economy does not offer many people a chance for creativity in the Marxist sense. Nor does Marx (or any socialist thinker of the central tradition) have much to say about those men and women whose economic activity consists entirely in helping other people. The helpmate, like the housewife, was never assimilated to the class of workers.

In similar fashion, politics in the contemporary democratic state does not offer many people a chance for Rousseauian self-determination. Citizenship, taken by itself, is today mostly a passive role: citizens are spectators who vote. Between elections they are served, well or badly, by the civil service. They are not at all like those heroes of republican mythology, the citizens of ancient Athens meeting in assembly and (foolishly, as it turned out) deciding to invade Sicily. But in the associational networks of civil society—in unions, parties, movements, interest groups, and so on—these same people make many smaller decisions and shape to some degree the more distant determinations of state and economy. And in a more densely organized, more egalitarian civil society, they might do both these things to greater effect.

These socially engaged men and women—part-time union officers, movement activists, party regulars, consumer advocates, welfare volunteers, church members, family heads—stand outside the republic of citizens as it is commonly conceived. They are only intermittently virtuous; they are too caught up in particularity. They look, most of them, for many partial fulfillments, no longer for the one clinching fulfillment. On the ground of actuality (unless the state usurps the ground), citizenship shades off into a great diversity of (sometimes divisive) decision-making roles; and, similarly, production shades off into a multitude of (sometimes competitive) socially useful activities. It is, then, a mistake to set politics and work in opposition to one another. There is no ideal fulfillment and no essential human capacity. We require many settings so that we can live different kinds of good lives.

All this is not to say, however, that we need to accept the capitalist version of competition and division. Theorists who regard the market as the preferred setting for the good life aim to make it the actual setting for as many aspects of life as possible. Their singlemindedness takes the form of market imperialism; confronting the democratic state, they are advocates of privatization and laissez-faire. Their ideal is a society in which all goods and services are provided by entrepreneurs to consumers. That some entrepreneurs would fail and many consumers find themselves helpless in the marketplace—this is the price of individual autonomy. It is, obviously, a price we already pay: in all capitalist societies, the market makes for inequality. The more successful its imperialism, the greater the inequality. But were the market to be set firmly within civil society, politically constrained, open to communal as well as private initiatives, limits might be fixed on its unequal outcomes. The exact nature of the limits would depend on the strength and density of the associational networks (including, now, the political community).

The problem with inequality is not merely that some individuals are more capable, others less capable, of making their consumer preferences effective. It's not that some individuals live in fancier apartments than others, or drive better-made cars, or take vacations in more exotic places. These are conceivably the just rewards of market success. The problem is that inequality commonly translates into domination and radical deprivation. But the verb "translates" here describes a socially mediated process, which is fostered or inhibited by the

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structure of its mediations. Dominated and deprived individuals are likely to be disorganized as well as impoverished, whereas poor people with strong families, churches, unions, political parties, and ethnic alliances are not likely to be dominated or deprived for long. Nor need these people stand alone even in the marketplace. The capitalist answer assumes that the good life of entrepreneurial initiative and consumer choice is a life led most importantly by individuals. But civil society encompasses or can encompass a variety of market agents: family businesses, publicly owned or municipal companies, worker communes, consumer cooperatives, nonprofit organizations of many different sorts. All these function in the market even though they have their origins outside. And just as the experience of democracy is expanded and enhanced by groups that are in but not of the state, so consumer choice is expanded and enhanced by groups that are in but not of the market.

It is only necessary to add that among the groups in but not of the state are market organizations, and among the groups in but not of the market are state organizations. All social forms are relativized by the civil society argument—and on the actual ground too. This also means that all social forms are contestable; moreover, contests can't be won by invoking one or another account of the preferred setting—as if it were enough to say that market organizations, insofar as they are efficient, don't have to be democratic or that state firms, insofar as they are democratically controlled, don't have to operate within the constraints of the market. The exact character of our associational life is something that has to be argued about, and it is in the course of these arguments that we also decide about the forms of democracy, the nature of work, the extent and effects of market inequalities, and much else.

The quality of nationalism is also determined within civil society, where national groups coexist and overlap with families and religious communities (two social formations largely neglected in modernist answers to the question about the good life) and where nationalism is expressed in schools and movements, organizations for mutual aid, cultural and historical societies. It is because groups like these are entangled with other groups, similar in kind but different in aim, that civil society holds out the hope of a domesticated nationalism. In states dominated by a single nation, the multiplicity of the groups pluralizes nationalist politics and culture; in states with more than one nation, the density of the networks prevents radical polarization.

Civil society as we know it has its origin in the struggle for religious freedom. Though often violent, the struggle held open the possibility of peace. "The establishment of this one thing," John Locke wrote about toleration, "would take away all ground of complaints and tumults upon account of conscience." One can easily imagine groundless complaints and tumults, but Locke believed (and he was largely right) that tolerance would dull the edge of religious conflict. People would be less ready to take risks once the stakes were lowered. Civil society simply is that place where the stakes are lower, where, in principle at least, coercion is used only to keep the peace and all associations are equal under the law. In the market, this formal equality often has no substance, but in the world of faith and identity, it is real enough. Though nations don't compete for members in the same way as religions (sometimes) do, the argument for granting them the associational freedom of civil society is similar. When they are free to celebrate their histories, remember their dead, and shape (in part) the education of their children, they are more likely to be harmless than when they are unfree. Locke may have put the claim too strongly when he wrote, "There is only one thing which gathers people into seditious commotions, and that is oppression," but he was close enough to the truth to warrant the experiment of radical tolerance.

But if oppression is the cause of seditious commotion, what is the cause of oppression? I don't doubt that there is a materialist story to tell here, but I want to stress the central role played by ideological singlemindedness: the intolerant universalism of (most) religions, the exclusivity of (most) nations. The actual experience of civil society, when it can be had,

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seems to work against these two. Indeed, it works so well, some observers think, that neither religious faith nor national identity is likely to survive for long in the network of free associations. But we really don't know to what extent faith and identity depend upon coercion or whether they can reproduce themselves under conditions of freedom. I suspect that they both respond to such deep human needs that they will outlast their current organizational forms. It seems, in any case, worthwhile to wait and see.

Still a Need for State Power

But there is no escape from power and coercion, no possibility of choosing, like the old anarchists, civil society alone. A few years ago, in a book called *Anti-Politics*, the Hungarian dissident George Konrad described a way of living alongside the totalitarian state but, so to speak, with one's back turned toward it. He urged his fellow dissidents to reject the very idea of seizing or sharing power and to devote their energies to religious, cultural, economic, and professional associations. Civil society appears in his book as an alternative to the state, which he assumes to be unchangeable and irredeemably hostile. His argument seemed right to me when I first read his book. Looking back, after the collapse of the Communist regimes in Hungary and elsewhere, I can easily see how much it was a product of its time—and how short that time was! No state can survive for long if it is wholly alienated from civil society. It cannot outlast its own coercive machinery; it is lost, literally, without its firepower. The production and reproduction of loyalty, civility, political competence, and trust in authority are never the work of the state alone, and the effort to go it alone—one meaning of totalitarianism—is doomed to failure.

The failure, however, has carried with it terrible costs, and so one can understand the appeal of contemporary antipolitics. Even as Central and East European dissidents take power, they remain, and should remain, cautious and apprehensive about its uses. The totalitarian project has left behind an abiding sense of bureaucratic brutality. Here was the ultimate form of political singlemindedness, and though the "democratic" (and, for that matter, the "communist") ideology that they appropriated was false, the intrusions even of a more genuine democracy are rendered suspect by the memory. Post-totalitarian politicians and writers have, in addition, learned the older antipolitics of free enterprise—so that the laissez-faire market is defended in the East today as one of the necessary institutions of civil society, or, more strongly, as the dominant social formation. This second view takes on plausibility from the extraordinary havoc wrought by totalitarian economic "planning." But it rests, exactly like political singlemindedness, on a failure to recognize the pluralism of associational life. The first view leads, often, to a more interesting and more genuinely liberal mistake: it suggests that pluralism is self-sufficient and self-sustaining.

This is, indeed, the experience of the dissidents: the state could not destroy their unions, churches, free universities, illegal markets, *samizdat* publications. Nonetheless, I want to warn against the antipolitical tendencies that commonly accompany the celebration of civil society. The network of associations incorporates, but it cannot dispense with, the agencies of state power; neither can socialist cooperation or capitalist competition dispense with the state. That's why so many dissidents are ministers now. It is indeed true that the new social movements in the East and the West—concerned with ecology, feminism, the rights of immigrants and national minorities, workplace and product safety, and so on—do not aim, as the democratic and labor movements once aimed, at taking power. This represents an important change, in sensibility as much as in ideology, reflecting a new valuation of parts over wholes and a new willingness to settle for something less than total victory. But there can be no victory at all that doesn't involve some control over, or use of, the state apparatus. The collapse of totalitarianism is empowering for the members of civil society precisely because it renders the state accessible.

Here, then, is the paradox of the civil society argument. Citizenship is one of many roles that

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members play, but the state itself is unlike all the other associations. It both frames civil society and occupies space within it. It fixes the boundary conditions and the basic rules of all associational activity (including political activity). It compels association members to think about a common good, beyond their own conceptions of the good life. Even the failed totalitarianism of, say, the Polish communist state had this much impact upon the Solidarity union: it determined that Solidarity was a Polish union, focused on economic arrangements and labor policy within the borders of Poland. A democratic state, which is continuous with the other associations, has at the same time a greater say about their quality and vitality. It serves, or it doesn't serve, the needs of the associational networks as these are worked out by men and women who are simultaneously members and citizens. I shall give only a few obvious examples, drawn from American experience.

Families with working parents need state help in the form of publicly funded day care and effective public schools. National minorities need help in organizing and sustaining their own educational programs. Worker-owned companies and consumer cooperatives need state loans or loan guarantees; so do (even more often) capitalist entrepreneurs and firms. Philanthropy and mutual aid, churches and private universities, depend upon tax exemptions. Labor unions need legal recognition and guarantees against "unfair labor practices." Professional associations need state support for their licensing procedures. And across the entire range of association, individual men and women need to be protected against the power of officials, employers, experts, party bosses, factory foremen, directors, priests, parents, patrons; and small and weak groups need to be protected against large and powerful ones. For civil society, left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, which only state power can challenge.

Civil society also challenges state power, most importantly when associations have resources or supporters abroad: world religions, pan-national movements, the new environmental groups, multinational corporations. We are likely to feel differently about these challenges, especially after we recognize the real but relative importance of the state. Multinational corporations, for example, need to be constrained, much like states with imperial ambitions; and the best constraint probably lies in collective security, that is, in alliances with other states that give economic regulation some international effect. The same mechanism may turn out to be useful to the new environmental groups. In the first case, the state pressures the corporation; in the second it responds to environmentalist pressure. The two cases suggest, again, that civil society requires political agency. And the state is an indispensable agent—even if the associational networks also, always, resist the organizing impulses of state bureaucrats.

Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society; only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state. The civility that makes democratic politics possible can only be learned in the associational networks; the roughly equal and widely dispersed capabilities that sustain the networks have to be fostered by the democratic state. Confronted with an overbearing state, citizens, who are also members, will struggle to make room for autonomous associations and market relationships (and also for local governments and decentralized bureaucracies). But the state can never be what it appears to be in liberal theory, a mere framework for civil society. It is also the instrument of the struggle, used to give a particular shape to the common life. Hence citizenship has a certain practical pre-eminence among all our actual and possible memberships. That's not to say that we must be citizens all the time, finding in politics, as Rousseau urged, the greater part of our happiness. Most of us will be happier elsewhere, involved only sometimes in affairs of state. But we must have a state open to our sometime involvement.

Nor need we be involved all the time in our associations. A democratic civil society is one controlled by its members, not through a single process of self-determination but through a large number of different and uncoordinated processes. These needn't all be democratic, for we are likely to be members of many

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associations, and we will want some of them to be managed in our interests, but also in our absence. Civil society is sufficiently democratic when in some, at least, of its parts we are able to recognize ourselves as authoritative and responsible participants. States are tested by their capacity to sustain this kind of participation—which is very different from the heroic intensity of Rousseauian citizenship. And civil society is tested by its capacity to produce citizens whose interests, at least sometimes, reach farther than themselves and their comrades, who look after the political community that fosters and protects the associational networks.

In Favor of Inclusiveness

I mean to defend a perspective that might be called, awkwardly, "critical associationalism." I want to join, but I am somewhat uneasy with, the civil society argument. It can't be said that nothing is lost when we give up the single-mindedness of democratic citizenship or socialist cooperation or individual autonomy or national identity. There was a kind of heroism in those projects—a concentration of energy, a clear sense of direction, an unblinking recognition of friends and enemies. To make one of these one's own was a serious commitment. The defense of civil society doesn't seem quite comparable. Associational engagement is conceivably as important a project as any of the others, but its greatest virtue lies in its inclusiveness, and inclusiveness does not make for heroism. "Join the associations of your choice" is not a slogan to rally political militants. And yet that is what civil society requires: men and women actively engaged—in state, economy, and nation, and also in churches, neighborhoods, and families, and in many other settings too. To reach this goal is not as easy as it sounds; many people, perhaps most people, live very loosely within the networks; a growing number of people seem to be radically disengaged—passive clients of the state, market dropouts, resentful and posturing nationalists. And the civil society project doesn't confront an energizing hostility, as all the others do; its protagonists are more likely to meet sullen indifference, fear, despair, apathy, and withdrawal.

In Central and Eastern Europe, civil society is still a battle cry, for it requires a dismantling of the totalitarian state and it brings with it the exhilarating experience of associational independence. Among ourselves what is required is nothing so grand; nor does it lend itself to a singular description (but this is what lies ahead in the East too). The civil society project can only be described in terms of all the other projects, against their singularity. Hence my account in these pages, which suggests the need (1) to decentralize the state so that there are more opportunities for citizens to take responsibility for (some of) its activities; (2) to socialize the economy so that there is a greater diversity of market agents, communal as well as private; and (3) to pluralize and domesticate nationalism, on the religious model, so that there are different ways to realize and sustain historical identities.

None of this can be accomplished without using political power to redistribute resources and to underwrite and subsidize the most desirable associational activities. But political power alone cannot accomplish any of it. The kinds of "action" discussed by theorists of the state need to be supplemented (not, however, replaced) by something radically different: more like union organizing than political mobilization, more like teaching in a school than arguing in the assembly, more like volunteering in a hospital than joining a political party, more like working in an ethnic alliance or a feminist support group than canvassing in an election, more like shaping a co-op budget than deciding on national fiscal policy. But can any of these local and small-scale activities ever carry with them the honor of citizenship? Sometimes, certainly, they are narrowly conceived, partial and particularist; they need political correction. The greater problem, however, is that they seem so ordinary. Living in civil society, one might think, is like speaking in prose.

But just as speaking in prose implies an understanding of syntax, so these forms of action (when they are pluralized) imply an

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understanding of civility. And that is not an understanding about which we can be entirely confident these days. There is something to be said for the neoconservative argument that in the modern world we need to recapture the density of associational life and relearn the activities and understandings that go with it. And if this is the case, then a more strenuous argument is called for from the left: we have to reconstruct that same density under new conditions of freedom and equality. It would appear to be an elementary requirement of social democracy that there exist a *society* of lively, engaged, and effective men and women—where the honor of "action" belongs to the many and not to the few.

Against a background of growing disorganization—violence, homelessness, divorce, abandonment, alienation, and addiction—a society of this sort looks more like a necessary achievement than a comfortable reality. In truth, however, it was never a comfortable reality, except for the few. Most men and women have been trapped in one or another subordinate relationship, where the "civility" they learned was deferential rather than independent and active. That is why democratic citizenship, socialist production, free enterprise, and nationalism were all of them liberating projects. But none of them has yet produced a general, coherent, or sustainable liberation. And their more single-minded adherents, who have exaggerated the effectiveness of the state or the market or the nation and neglected the networks, have probably contributed to the disorder of contemporary life. The projects have to be relativized and brought together, and the place to do that is in civil society, the setting of settings, where each can find the partial fulfillment that is all it deserves.

Civil society itself is sustained by groups much smaller than the demos or the working class or the mass of consumers or the nation. All these are necessarily fragmented and localized as they are incorporated. They become part of the world of family, friends, comrades, and colleagues, where people are connected to one another and made responsible for one another. Connected and responsible: without that, "free and equal" is less attractive than we once thought it would be. I have no magic formula for making connections or strengthening the sense of responsibility. These aren't aims that can be underwritten with historical guarantees or achieved through a single unified struggle. Civil society is a project of projects; it requires many organizing strategies and new forms of state action. It requires a new sensitivity for what is local, specific, contingent—and, above all, a new recognition (to paraphrase a famous sentence) that the good life is in the details. □

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Dennis Wrong

PROGRESS AS DELUSION?

THE TRUE AND ONLY HEAVEN: PROGRESS AND ITS CRITICS, by Christopher Lasch. W.W. Norton, 1991. 591 pp. $25.

Christopher Lasch's earliest books were about radical intellectuals in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century America and the movements of the left they supported. Lasch was critical of these movements and their intellectual allies for failing to maintain a consistent and realistic opposition to capitalism, identifying himself with the assault on "corporate liberalism" of the then-ascendant New Left. It did not take Lasch long, however, to discern in the New Left itself all the faults of its predecessors writ large. Without abandoning his earlier criticisms of "cold-war liberals" and "technocrats," he assimilated the New Left to the broadly elitist and self-serving assumptions shared, in his view, by all progressivist intellectuals. The books that established Lasch's reputation as a social critic, *Haven in a Heartless World, The Culture of Narcissism,* and *The Minimal Self*, drew on Freud and the culture and personality tradition in sociology and anthropology to buttress rejection of the anxious hedonism of contemporary American life.

In *The True and Only Heaven* Lasch returns to intellectual history, going back as far as the eighteenth century to seek out ancestors who repudiated the idea of progress and were dubious about the supposed benefits of technology without becoming nostalgic reactionaries mourning the disappearance of some *ancien régime*. Indeed, in a valuable early chapter Lasch treats nostalgia as the counterpart to belief in progress, the substitution of a self-indulgent fantasy of a past that never was for serious consideration of the bearing of the past on the present and future. Nostalgia, he notes, was originally coined to describe a psychological disorder with such physical symptoms as irregular breathing and gastroenteritis.

Lasch reviews an immense range of thinkers, political movements, and ideological currents critical of the major trends of industrial capitalism over the past two and a half centuries while remaining clearly distinct from its socialist opponents. Christian moralists worried about the corruptions of luxury and affluence; early critics of wage labor as a form of slavery; celebrants of individual heroism and striving for excellence fearful of the enervating effects of the conformist pressures of urban society; the sociological tradition of communitarianism afflicted with what Lasch dubs *Gemeinschafts-schmerz*; syndicalists and guild socialists who wanted the workers to run industry themselves, dispensing with both capitalist and state managers; nineteenth-century agrarian populists affirming individual proprietorship and bitterly opposed both to the "wage system" and the manipulations of money men; the "new labor historians" since the 1960s who have discovered that independent artisans offered stronger revolutionary resistance to early capitalist exploitation than proletarians—all are included in Lasch's story. He also subjects a number of individual thinkers to detailed examination in a sympathetic spirit: Jonathan Edwards, William Cobbett, Tom Paine, Orestes Brownson, Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, Georges Sorel, G.D.H. Cole, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Nor does he neglect the positions taken by their political and intellectual adversaries.

Underlying the obvious diversity of the movements and thinkers surveyed, Lasch finds some common emphases. All of them valued individual responsibility, devotion to work, the primacy of the concrete, moral realism about human nature, a sense of limits, anti-utopian skepticism. These qualities are, Lasch maintains, particularly characteristic of "the sensibility of the petty bourgeoisie," although he repudiates Marxist and sociological reductionism that treats culture and morality as mere reflections of economic interest or social position. In the face of the almost universal contempt expressed by intellectuals for the petty bourgeoisie, Lasch's claim resembles that of E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* in wishing to rescue certain social groups and political movements from "the enormous condescension of posterity." However, in contrast to Thompson's preoccupation with

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nascently class-conscious manual workers, Lasch wants to defend the small producers who lost out to the emerging industrial order. He also wants to associate their outlook with the present values of the lower-middle class, including those of blue-collar workers who have experienced *embourgeoisement*, against their liberal and socialist detractors. He identifies these values with "populism," a label he is anxious to salvage by ridding it of its vague and usually pejorative overtones. Populists view with suspicion not only big business but also the cultural elitism of liberal intellectuals, the historical vanguardism of Marxists, and the centralizing thrust of social democrats eager to extend the welfare state.

The continuity between these views and the decentralist, antibureaucratic communitarianism of the early New Left is obvious. In his introductory chapter Lasch gives an account of his own political history—his Midwestern Progressive and pro-New Deal background, his movement to the left in opposition to the cold-war stasis of the 1950s, his disillusionment with the "revolutionary histrionics" of the New Left. (Although he does not say as much, a good deal of old-fashioned isolationism has always been part of his political makeup—foreign policy has never been one of his strong points.) The experience of parenthood, he claims, led him in the mid-seventies to studies of the family and socialization and eventually turned him against a liberalism that "now meant sexual freedom, women's rights, gay rights; denunciation of the family as the seat of all oppression; denunciation of 'patriarchy'; denunciation of 'working-class authoritarianism.' "

But Lasch did not become a conservative rhetorically upholding "traditional values." Seeking a historical lineage for populism, he was influenced by the tradition of "republican virtue" recently revived by a few theorists anxious not to cede the entire heritage of the Enlightenment to the "possessive individualism" of bourgeois liberalism. Lasch observes, however, that these writers have often presented "a caricature of liberalism"; he even speaks up for "the wise Locke," as Rousseau called him, noting that recent Locke scholarship has shown that Locke himself had severe reservations about boundless acquisitiveness and big as opposed to small capitalism. Lasch's wide scholarship in intellectual history joined to his social criticism endows *The True and Only Heaven* with its distinctive flavor.

Lasch extols what he calls "producerism" over the passive "consumerism" of contemporary capitalism, which promotes "the shift from a work ethic to a consumption ethic." "The politics of the civilized minority," as he entitles his penultimate chapter, both reflects and helps create this new passivity. The inveterate elitism of the intellectuals is an additional expression of increasing acceptance of universal dependence on professional experts and commodities marketed by large enterprises relying on advertising. Sixties radicals are part of this trend: it is easy to imagine Lasch recoiling in disgust after hearing just one too many callow graduate student pronounce that millions of his plebeian fellow-citizens are victims of "false consciousness" (today it would be "hegemonic ideology"). He says he was surprised to find that more moderate left-wing intellectuals were still, after all the terrible events of this century, believers not only in material but in moral progress. And, of course, they saw their own political and cultural beliefs as enlightened anticipations of the future, thus entitling them to make use of such nondemocratic agencies as the courts and the federal bureaucracy to implement policies unlikely to win popular support.

Doubtless there is a sense in which H.L. Mencken and his admirers in the twenties, New Deal social planners, the foundation-sponsored research of such social scientists as Robert Lynd and Gunnar Myrdal, political psychotherapists diagnosing "authoritarianism," the Camelot mythologists of the Kennedy years, student radicals of the sixties, the "suburban" neoliberalism of the seventies and eighties, and judicial supporters of busing and affirmative action share a common "elitism" and belief in progress. But Lasch paints with too broad a brush. He telescopes together earlier and later tendencies and overlooks the ferocious controversies within and between them: power elitists against pluralists, Marxists against liberals, cold-war supporters against peace advocates. For example, he lumps together contributors to the theme of the *embourgeoisement* of the working class in the 1950s, ignoring the sharp debate between liberal supporters of the Keynesian–welfare state consensus and socialists who still regarded the workers as a potentially radical force. By the end of the sixties, to be sure, the New Left had for the most part dismissed the working class as politically indistinguishable from the despised lower-middle class. But this came *after* the *embourgeoisement* controversy among sociologists, superseding the briefly revived Marxism of a large segment of the postwar intelligentsia. In general, Lasch alludes too infrequently to the chief countertendency to the elitism he condemns: the idealization of oppressed groups, whether workers, blacks, or Third World peasants, imputing to them primitive vigor, innocent virtue, and natural solidarity. The disdain for the petty bourgeoisie of which Lasch makes so much owes a

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lot to this disposition of bourgeois intellectuals to romanticize classes that are still lower in status than those just below them.

In his Preface Lasch insists, "I have no intention of minimizing the narrowness and provincialism of lower-middle class culture; nor do I deny that it has produced racism, nativism, anti-intellectualism and all the other evils often cited by liberal critics." He finally turns to a consideration of these negative qualities in his last chapter, "Right-Wing Populism and the Revolt Against Liberalism." After a fairly conventional analysis of the ambiguity of the concept "middle class," he reviews the "cultural class war" over patriotic symbols, busing, abortion, affirmative action, pornography, homosexuality, and other so-called social issues. The revolt against liberalism and the Democratic party at the polls and in some lower-middle- and working-class communities represents a defense of a way of life threatened by politicians, bureaucrats, and professionals who do not themselves experience the effects of the policies they devise. This has by now become a fairly familiar diagnosis; Lasch draws on the useful work of such sociologists as Jonathan Rieder, Kristin Luker, Lillian Rubin, E.E. LeMasters, and Herbert Gans and the journalists J. Anthony Lukas and Kevin Phillips. He rightly observes that the blatant anti-Americanism of the movement protesting the Vietnam War may have had the effect of strengthening support for the war among people who might otherwise have opposed it.

Nor does Lasch overlook the excesses of the resistance to liberal social policies, remarking of the antibusing movement in Boston that it "seldom rose above the level of resentment, self-righteousness, and self-pity." He is aware that his defense of right-wing protest movements, though qualified, brings him close to the standard neoconservative polemic against liberal intellectuals. He perceptively criticizes the neoconservatives, however, for striving to deflect blame for the hedonistic "permissiveness" they denounce from consumer capitalism by charging it to a "new class" of intellectuals whose influence they grossly exaggerate. Left-wing new-class theories, on the other hand, go in for the reverse operation. *Both* consumer capitalism and the educated classes (whether or not they constitute a truly new class) are jointly responsible for our plight, in Lasch's view.

But if the neoconservatives obfuscate a political disagreement in identifying as their adversary a vaguely defined new class, is not Lasch guilty of a similar error in socially grounding the morality he wishes to defend in the petty bourgeoisie? The values of hard work, self-discipline, frugality, personal independence, family loyalty, and local pride have a long history and were not always peculiarly characteristic of the lower-middle class. They were part of a general bourgeois outlook with roots in Puritanism and even earlier peasant traditions before the transformations that have shaped contemporary capitalism. Lasch's own intellectual heroes—Emerson, James, and Niebuhr—were hardly of petty-bourgeois origins.

If the cultural class war has often twisted these values into ugly forms of racial bigotry and intolerance, it may also have deformed the anti-traditionalism of the liberal intelligentsia, which has hardly been politically ascendant in recent decades. That people should have as wide a range of choice as possible in personal and family life may as a principle lend itself both to abuse in practice and to conversion into a smug nihilistic relativism that preens itself on its superiority to those who live by more restrictive codes. Lasch often includes feminist beliefs in the roster of "enlightened" liberal attitudes that he condemns, although he never directly confronts feminism. Feminism has produced its share of rigid ideologues, but it is surely an idea whose time has come. Lasch thinks that damage to the natural environment puts an end to the prospect of perpetual material progress, but if so, it also rules out continued population growth, which has obvious and weighty implications for the traditional roles of women. Lasch himself recognizes that new-class intellectuals, though a diversified group, share an admirable critical, empirical, and cosmopolitan outlook that need not degenerate into snobbery and cynicism. Perhaps all values assume unattractive dogmatic forms when they are selectively upheld by different classes and social groups locked in bitter political and ideological conflict.

Although he may not appreciate the comparison, there are striking similarities between Lasch's general argument and that of Daniel Bell in *The End of Ideology* thirty years ago. Their very language is often identical. Both writers begin by claiming that old political ideologies are "exhausted." Both men admire and say they have learned from Reinhold Niebuhr. Lasch thinks the crisis of the environment negates the belief in progress still affirmed by both left and right. Bell thought that the experience of world wars and totalitarian regimes must necessarily moderate the intensity of ideological conflict. Both men deplore the sacrifice of the living to utopian visions of the future.

Lasch concludes his immensely long book with the insistence that "Limits and hope: these words

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sum up the two lines of argument I have tried to weave together." Bell chose as an epigraph to his title essay Machiavelli's statement, "Men commit the error of not knowing when to limit their hopes." I was one of the first critics of the end-of-ideology thesis, arguing that a sense of limits needed to be balanced by recognition of the indestructibility of hope. Lasch makes a distinction between hope as basic trust in the possibilities of life and optimism, which he links to belief in progress and the lack of a sense of tragedy in history.

Bell limited the end of ideology to the West and noted the continuing appeal of revolutionary apocalypticism in the underdeveloped countries. Lasch asks on the first page of his opening chapter, "Who would have predicted, twenty-five years ago, that as the twentieth century approached its end, it would be the left that was everywhere in retreat?" Obviously, the query applies also to the Third World, where faith in state-directed rapid modernization has largely waned. Although Lasch nowhere so much as mentions the collapse of communism, it clearly strengthens his case against progress toward a "true and only heaven" that will completely transcend the past. Bell may have overestimated the stability of the transitory consensus of the 1950s and failed fully to anticipate the brief revival of radicalism in the sixties, but he was right about the long-run trend, as he argued in a new Afterword to a reissue of his book two years ago.

Lasch would clearly welcome a new populist revolt in American politics centered on the economic interests of the hard-pressed lower-middle and working classes while bypassing the divisive cultural issues. Unlike Kevin Phillips, however, he wisely declines to predict the occurrence of such a revolt. Nevertheless, in addition to its historical scope and depth, *The True and Only Heaven* provides valuable new understanding of the curious political interregnum that now prevails in *fin de siècle* America. □

George Scialabba

DEFENDERS OF MARXISM

SOCIALIST REGISTER 1990: THE RETREAT OF THE INTELLECTUALS, edited by Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch. London: Merlin Press. 365 pp. $16.00 (paper).

Anyone who thinks that the collapse of the Soviet and East European regimes discredited Marxism and socialism is—to put it charitably—having an off day. As Alasdair MacIntyre, no sympathizer, once observed: "The barbarous despotism of the collective Tsardom which reigns in Moscow [is] as irrelevant to the question of the moral substance of Marxism as the life of the Borgia pope was to that of the moral substance of Christianity."

In fact, the withering away of Soviet communism is not only one of the best things that ever happened; it's one of the best things that ever happened to Marxism and socialism. Some misunderstandings are, after all, easier to cope with than others. Better to be regarded by our potential audience as harmless fossils than as apologists for totalitarianism; better to be greeted with amused incredulity than with fierce indignation. It might be just a bit easier now to get people to sit still for an explanation of why it suited the ruling classes of East and West alike to identify Soviet and Third World communism with genuine socialism.

Needless to say, mainstream intellectuals won't be much help—if you're smart enough and scrupulous enough to make such inconvenient distinctions, you don't get into the mainstream. What does need to be said, though, according to the editors of *Socialist Register 1990*, is that a lot of left-wing intellectuals aren't being much help just now, either, having lost their bearings or in some cases their scruples. Cheap shots and obsolete misunderstandings abound; hence this volume of intellectual rectification, the latest of *Socialist Register*'s annual surveys of the left or (occasionally) the real world.

The Retreat of the Intellectuals goes back well before 1989, actually. Its sixteen contributors have found evidence throughout the eighties of a "general retreat from socialism"; the very "notion of a radical alternative to capitalism has been correspondingly devalued in the eyes of many intellectuals who had previously been committed to it."

Is this an orthodox Marxist counterattack against recent revisionisms: feminism, deconstruction, the theory and practice of the "new social movements"? Yes and no. The editors say no, of course not, we welcome the many invaluable criticisms of the tradition made by our feminist and other comrades (it's unclear whether invaluable criticisms by liberals, social democrats, and other nonconrades are equally welcome); we recognize that "constant reappraisal is essential for socialism to advance"; and so on in this conciliatory vein. But to the targets of these essays, rudely interrupted while partying on Marx's grave, the volume will undoubtedly appear a hostile act: the revenge of the retros.

As a (largely) neutral observer in this civil war, I can report that some, at least, of the sorties in *Retreat of the Intellectuals* are devastating. In the

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book's lead essay, "Seven Types of Obloquy: Travesties of Marxism," Norman Geras shows that quite a few intelligent people have written quite a lot of nonsense lately about Marx or "classical Marxism" or "the Marxist tradition." For example, that Marx thought "each individual . . . has all the capacities that any other has" (Jon Elster); that for classical Marxism, "politics is an arena which simply reflects already unified collective political identities" (Stuart Hall); that Marxism "excludes the possibility . . . that there might be other modes of domination than socioeconomic class relations" (Jean Cohen); or that Marx held out "the utopian hope of perfect reconciliation," of a conflict-free, "fully redeemed social order" (Martin Jay). If all this were true, then good riddance to Marxism. It isn't, as Geras demonstrates in his exquisitely reasoned and phrased rebuttal.

Ellen Wood's "The Uses and Abuses of 'Civil Society' " argues two theses. First, that "formal democracy" (a.k.a. "bourgeois democracy"), while unambiguously good, is nevertheless "a *subtraction* from the substance of the democratic idea, and one which is historically and structurally associated with capitalism." Second, that "while all oppressions have equal *moral* claims, class exploitation has a different *historical* status, a more strategic location at the heart of capitalism; and class struggle may have a more universal reach, a greater potential for advancing not only class emancipation but other emancipatory struggles too." The superiority of socialist democracy and the primacy of class are complicated notions and currently unpopular on the left. Many leftists consider them already dead and buried. But Wood is unapologetic and her arguments forceful.

Bryan Palmer's "The Eclipse of Materialism" and Paul Cammack's "Statism, New Institutionalism, and Marxism" are the other two outstanding essays in *Retreat of the Intellectuals*. Palmer deplores the abandonment of historical materialism in favor of symbolic and "discourse" analysis, exemplified in the work of such current notables as Francois Furet on the French Revolution, Gareth Stedman Jones on Chartism, and Joan Scott on the working-class family in the nineteenth century. Cammack reviews the rise of a literature within comparative sociology and political science that emphasizes the freedom of the state and other political institutions from direct ruling-class control, in apparent (though not real, he claims) contradiction to the expectations generated by Marxist theory. Palmer's and Cammack's essays are too specialized to persuade anyone but a professional. Still, they're dense and carefully argued, so anyone who cares to can learn a lot from them.

There are a great many notes in the socialist register, and a great many more essays in this issue of *Socialist Register*. Amy Bartholomew discourses a bit bloodlessly about Marx and moral philosophy. Terry Eagleton gratuitously raps Richard Rorty. Frederic Jameson natters on about "postmodernism and the market." George Ross fumes over the intellectual depravity of contemporary France. Eleanor MacDonald tries valiantly to pin down Derrida's politics. A wild man from Oregon, John Bellamy Foster, denounces most of the U.S. left for its craven "liberal practicality" and discerns in the Rainbow Coalition "the first signs of a nascent mass-based class struggle." Throughout, rigor and militancy are recommended, intellectual and strategic backsliding rebuked.

Rigor and militancy are glorious virtues. And yet, to paraphrase Yeats, too much of them can make a stone of the heart. For all the intelligence and dedication of its contributors, there's something a little arid and doctrinaire about *The Retreat of the Intellectuals*. It bespeaks, it seems to promise only an angry isolation, an austere comradeship. No doubt this *ad hominem* comment will seem, to the book's partisans, unfair. Perhaps it is, though it's certainly not meant dismissively.

As a specimen of how the beleaguered intelligence can lose its moral balance, consider what may be the most rigorous and militant essay in the book, "Eulogy Beside an Empty Grave: Reflections on the Future of Socialism," by Richard Levins. It is full of pungent and poignant writing, taut with moral indignation, studded with precise distinctions and compelling formulations. Then comes this appalling passage:

> The greatest failures of most contemporary revolutions have been in the area of building socialist democracy. . . . Here again, it is important to reject simple caricatures. Socialist revolutions did bring large masses of people into political life as actors in history. In some cases, advanced political forms were established to allow for grass roots democracy of a kind much deeper than that of capitalist politics. The judicial systems with the demystification of the legal process and the development of peoples' and neighborhood courts is one such area. The system of participation by volunteers in the working committees of legislative bodies, extensive nationwide discussion of proposed legislation, the required report back of representatives, the principle of collective leadership are among the formal achievements of socialist states. But forms are not enough, and in many ways these forms eroded and lost real content. How this

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happened is something that has to be studied very carefully. It is not a simple matter of authorities suppressing discussion and bypassing the legal democratic structures. Democratic participation also requires . . . the overthrow of deeply rooted attitudes and beliefs, deference to authority, dependence on outstanding leaders, timidities that are built into the socialization of people in class societies. Without these deeper social changes, the democratic forms become empty and a little bit of intimidation goes a long way.

Life in Communist societies has so far ranged from merely oppressive to utterly nightmarish. As a description of this epoch of woe, the above paragraph is not only not adequate, it is not decent. It is fully as misleading as the "simple caricatures" it rightly rejects—and whose exasperating persistence and pervasiveness in American political culture is probably responsible, at least in part, for Levins's cold-blooded pseudoprecision.

It's surely too much to expect a perfectly balanced rigor and militancy, equipotent in all directions. Everyone's energy and imagination are limited. *The Retreat of the Intellectuals* makes a plausible case for one set of priorities. But then—to adopt the editors' military metaphor—why should all intellectuals be in the vanguard? The socialist army needs scouts, too, and slackers: hedonists (or even cowardly careerists) who can see the point of *Socialist Register 1990* but also remind its contributors that a movement whose atmosphere was dominated by their scornful rigor and fierce militancy might well inspire not just occasional retreats but mass desertion. □

Ruth Milkman

WOMEN & WAGES

A WOMAN'S WAGE: HISTORICAL MEANINGS & SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES, by Alice Kessler-Harris. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990. 168 pp. $19.00.

Historians of women were confronted with an unusual dilemma a few years ago, when their work became the object of impassioned debate in an unlikely forum: the courtroom. In 1984, defending itself against an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) lawsuit alleging systematic sex discrimination, Sears Roebuck, the world's largest retailer and the nation's largest private-sector employer of women, engaged historian Rosalind Rosenberg as an expert witness. In support of Sears's claim that, far from being victims of discrimination, women simply were not attracted to the highly paid commission sales jobs at issue in the case, Rosenberg testified that throughout American history women had shunned some types of work and preferred others. Drawing on the notion of "women's culture," which stresses the distinctive values and cultural orientations women develop as a result of their social location, Rosenberg suggested that the sex-segregated pattern of employment at Sears could best be understood as the product of women's own choices.

Faced with this, the EEOC sought its own expert witness and found one in Alice Kessler-Harris, easily the nation's most prominent historian of women's labor. Kessler-Harris testified that, contrary to Rosenberg's claims, historically women have eagerly seized any opportunities to enter highly paid "men's" jobs. The reason so few women are found in such jobs, Kessler-Harris argued, is that employers have rarely offered them these opportunities. The debate between Rosenberg and Kessler-Harris, perhaps inevitably given the courtroom setting, became a sharply polarized contest between a perspective emphasizing women's cultural values and one emphasizing their economic interests.

Although the Sears case is mentioned only briefly in the final chapter of Kessler-Harris's fine new book, in a sense it lurks behind every page. For this volume is concerned with the complex interconnections between culture and economics as they shape women's workplace experience—precisely the connections that the Sears debate obscured. Kessler-Harris takes up a question that is usually viewed in purely economic terms: the wages paid to women. She argues that the "economic" processes shaping wage rates are deeply embedded in the larger society or, in other words, that economics and culture are inextricably intertwined. "The wage participates in social custom and practice," she writes, highlighting specifically those customs and practices involving gender. The book's goal is to reveal "how gender is inscribed into the wage and how the wage helps to construct gendered expectations for both men and women." Thus Kessler-Harris unequivocally rejects the simple opposition between cultural expectations and economic interests that was so pivotal in the legal construction of the Sears case. She shows the absurdity of seeing wages as purely market-determined, while simultaneously exposing the naiveté of accepting at face value (as Rosenberg's Sears testimony did) the cultural assumptions influencing economic behavior.

In a series of essays, each elucidating a distinct type of social struggle over the definition of the wage and its implications for women, the book

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explores the changing historical context in which women's wages were shaped over the course of the twentieth century. The first chapter argues that wages in the early part of the century were based on explicitly gendered notions of economic need. In a pattern that has still not entirely disappeared, men were seen as entitled to a "family wage," that is, a wage sufficient for family support (although in reality pay levels fell short of this standard for many workingmen), while women's much lower wages were justified by the assumption that they were supplementary wage earners. Women began to challenge this assumption in the late 1910s and 1920s, motivated not so much by aspirations to equality with men as by new, individualistic needs and wants stimulated by the emergent culture of consumerism.

In this same period, many states passed minimum-wage legislation for women. A product of Progressivism, such legislation was rooted in conceptions of gender difference that favored the family. Now the same cultural assumptions used to justify women's lower wages were mobilized to protect women from superexploitation. At the same time, as a form of state regulation of the market, minimum wages challenged the hegemony of the ideology of "freedom of contract" that had triumphed in the late nineteenth century. Kessler-Harris's second chapter, an exercise in legal history, shows how court decisions about the minimum wage issue shifted with changing political tides. After supporting minimum wages in the Progressive era, the courts turned against them in the 1920s, only to reverse course once again during the depression—now, however, endorsing a gender-neutral minimum for the first time.

If support for intervention in the marketplace in the name of social justice redounded to women's benefit in the case of minimum wages, the opposite was true when it came to married women's right to work. Drawing on letters women wrote to Franklin D. Roosevelt and to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, Kessler-Harris explores the conflict over this issue during the depression. In the context of high unemployment, the claim articulated by some married women to equal treatment as individuals in the labor market collided with the more popular counterclaim (even among women) that men should have priority—again in the name of family support.

The situation changed once depression gave way to war. Kessler-Harris shows how the tension between individual women's rights to equality and men's right to a family wage dissolved during World War II under the banner of "equal pay for equal work." While women were performing "men's jobs," ensuring that they received "men's pay" was in the interests of all: it protected male jobs and wage rates over the long term by removing the attraction of female substitution and it served the cause of gender equality.

Equal pay for equal work was always a limited demand, however, since in a sex-segregated labor market few women perform work "equal" to that of men, except under the peculiar conditions of wartime. Kessler-Harris examines the recent debate over women's wages generated by the campaign for "comparable worth," which goes beyond "equal pay for equal work" to question the basis for wage differentials between traditionally male and traditionally female jobs. This challenge to gender inequality emerged against the background of rapid increases in labor force participation among married women and mothers and the resurgence of feminism, both of which have seriously eroded the family wage ideology. Today the popular conception of wage justice is focused on the individual and is explicitly gender neutral, undercutting any notion that the market can be relied upon to set wages in a just fashion. The gender gap in wages thus appears as a historical relic, and as it loses legitimacy, the gendered character of the wage becomes increasingly transparent.

Throughout, Kessler-Harris rejects the dichotomy between culture and "the economic" that was central to the Sears case. Her earlier book, *Out to Work* (Oxford, 1982), exposed the ways in which cultural definitions of gender shifted over time in response to changing economic and political forces; here she focuses on the other side of this dynamic, showing how a phenomenon that appears to be narrowly economic—the wage—is itself a cultural and ideological construction. □

David Bromwich

VALUES OF LIBERALISM

ESSAYS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, by R.G. Collingwood, Edited with an Introduction by David Boucher. Oxford University Press, 1989. $48.00.

One of the great British scholars of the twentieth century, R. G. Collingwood is chiefly remembered today as the author of three books: *The Idea of History, The Idea of Nature,* and *The Principles of Art.* All are remarkable works of philosophical inquiry. Yet Collingwood was also a historian, the author, with J. N. L. Myres, of *Roman Britain and*

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the English Settlements; and in the argument he was advancing all his life, the two vocations were deeply connected. Thought has a history: it is always an attempt to answer certain questions which themselves are posed in the language of a certain time and place. It follows that all ideas grow out of human needs. Ideas, however, are not therefore reducible to an expression of human needs. A thought is not a counter in a game—not even in the great game of culture—and to decode the game is not to exhaust the uses of a given thought. Here Collingwood, who may have looked like an ally, ends as a principled opponent of modern historicism and relativism. Societies come and go, but the habits of human self-reflection evolve, and those habits matter just because they build upon the discoveries of earlier epochs. Collingwood believed it was the task of history and philosophy together to separate the regressive elements in a legacy of ideas from the elements that ought to be preserved.

Essays in Political Philosophy is divided into two sections. The first covers general ideas, such as utility, punishment, political action, and the tension between ends and means in economics. The second is composed of lectures and articles from the 1930s on fascism, Nazism, and the one great problem of the age, which Collingwood came to describe as the survival of civilization. It is these latter comments, apparently ephemeral, which have proved timely in the long run. By civilization Collingwood meant, of course, *his* civilization, but he defended it without irony. The idea of tolerance as an active virtue and of respect for the individual as an unqualified good: this seemed to him a late discovery, the result of a long development that could not be given up without an unimaginable backward step. As a general proposition, some such view was widely shared. Collingwood could number in his party Dewey, Russell, Orwell, the broad suffrage of liberal intellectuals in Europe and America. He stands apart from these thinkers, however, when he argues that liberalism has a long background in Western thought.

The prehistory of liberalism, he says, is not to be found only in the Enlightenment—with its new belief in liberty of conscience and the dignity of human nature—but long before the Enlightenment, in the radical humanism of Christianity.

> The real ground for the "liberal" or "democratic" devotion to freedom was religious love of a God who set an absolute value on every individual human being. Free speech and free inquiry concerning political and scientific questions; free consent in issues arising out of economic activity; free enjoyment of the produce won by a man's own labor—the opposite of all tyranny and oppression, exploitation and robbery—these were ideals based on the infinite dignity or worth of the human individual; and this again was based on the fact that God loved the human individual and Christ had died for him. The doctrines concerning human nature on which liberal or democratic practice was based were not empirically derived from research into anthropological and psychological data; they were a matter of faith; and these Christian doctrines were the source from which they were derived.

The process by which this history was forgotten, Collingwood thinks, may belong to the curious pathology of iconoclasm. For modern liberals have taken over from nineteenth-century positivism the dogma that secular ideas like ours must in no way resemble a faith.

But individuality and tolerance are ultimate goods, and in fact are only intelligible as part of a faith. This does not mean a wager, a bargain, or a prediction. No one who believes liberal tolerance is good for the sake of a result—some probable or wished-for outcome—will advocate liberal tolerance for long or in the worst hazards. Vague words like "individuality" and "tolerance" are rather a way of pointing to something we believe is already there. "This one fact the world hates," said Emerson: "that the soul *becomes*." Perhaps liberal tolerance means nothing more than a protection for the soul against an instinct as deep as conformity. Anyway, this conception of tolerance is not confined to the work of Emerson and his followers. As Collingwood notices, the same argument appears, though in a subordinate position, in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. Most people remember from that book only the leading argument. I cannot, writes Mill, in principle ever deny anyone the right to express a view distinct from mine, or to experiment in a way of life opposed to mine; for I can never know that an unexpected truth might not emerge from a soil I find repellent, and on the discovery of truths like this the progress of society depends. But that is still a utilitarian argument, and vulnerable to the utilitarian reply that James Fitzjames Stephen gave in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. If I believe I hold the right view of conduct, and I suppose, further, that all morality is founded on consensus, the benefit I gain by sustaining my view will more than offset the loss I suffer by prohibiting certain kinds of expression and action.

The truth is that Mill had given too much away by agreeing that the progress of society should be considered the highest good. His second, apparently slighter, but much more powerful argument recalls the background that Collingwood sees as having

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accompanied liberalism all along. The highest good now becomes the progress of a person. What can that mean? When I forbid some expression or action as morally offensive to me, I act on an abiding impulse in human nature: the wish to believe that I have already come to a resting place. We can regard the impulse critically, as inertia, or positively, as the source of all stability. Mill only wants us to see that it is in our nature to resist change—not the shallow variations of manners or customs, which happen all the time and are themselves a great prompter of conformity; but the tremendous and always unwelcome mutations of thought and feeling, which alter permanently one's sense of oneself and the world. To keep myself in a state of rest, I will do anything to guard against this kind of disturbance, and intolerant laws can help by ridding my society of thoughts whose expression gives offense, or of persons whose way of life seems at odds with mine. In the face of every such fear, Mill seems to say to the liberal, you cannot stop the person or practice you detest from going its way as long as it allows you to go yours. The fear may well be justified. But the desire to act upon it is a sick desire: it comes from wanting to avoid, once and for all, the possibility of a change in oneself. Consequently, whatever evil may follow, in the absence of a practical threat you must never reduce this fear to a practice of intolerance. For you agree to tolerance, not out of kindness to the claims of the other person, but from an irreducible respect for yourself. Mill speaks for a liberalism that denies the soul can ever properly exist at the sacrifice of anything whose only insult to oneself is that it, too, exists.

Collingwood is right to claim as a precursor the Mill of *On Liberty,* and right to add that Mill in that essay did not fathom the depth of his own commitments. The individual is the good a liberal society aims to preserve. The community is a real though contingent good, and itself requires much vigilance in order to survive: "A community can only live a genuinely political life when crime is, not indeed abolished, but so far kept in check that for ordinary purposes it may be ignored." This will hold true *a fortiori* under liberalism, where other sorts of uncertainty are encouraged: "The one essential of liberalism is the dialectical solution of all political problems: that is, their solution through the statement of opposing views and free discussion until, beneath this opposition, their supporters have discovered some common ground on which to act."

Yet it is wrong to think of the result as an "achievement" of liberalism,

> for it is not and has never been authoritatively a finished product; as a theory, it has never been authoritatively and finally stated, and as a form of political practice it has never been worked out in all its implications. It has been, not so much something done, as something in the doing: a course of action to which our civilization has committed itself, realizing that the developments to which it will lead are not wholly foreseen.

Some of the means adopted, Collingwood believes, are bound to be commonplace. As much in a liberal democracy as in any other political system, citizens fall into two classes, the rulers and the ruled. The difference is that the permeability of each class to the other is taken for granted.

In such a society, the assumptions about the proper character of a leader will be minimal: "No politician is such an expert that he should be allowed to govern without being exposed to the criticism of his fellow experts, none such a beginner that his opinion is valueless to the community." Political judgment must always defer to the ratifying power of the community. But, as a giver of meaning, the community is liable at different times to place too high and too low a value on itself. Too high, when it forgets that every thought does have a meaning apart from the social context in which it is embedded, for the thought testifies to the unshakeable respect owed to the mind that formed it. Too low, when it asks to be shaped into a single will and to be relieved of the necessity of choosing. In a lecture of 1933 Collingwood warned his students:

> Everywhere you will hear people saying that they want a leader. Demand creates supply, and leaders are forthcoming. But before you swear allegiance to any of them, I would ask you to remember this. If you find a leader worth following, you must offer him followers worth leading. You can only do this if you are so far independent of any leader as to live in a way that deserves the name of living before you find him.

By a condition of Collingwood's estate, the editor of *Essays in Political Philosophy,* David Boucher, has been stopped from reprinting any of the articles, lectures, or drafts in quite its whole length. Nevertheless, in their fragmentary way, these essays make as true a vindication of the *activity* of liberalism as we have had in the twentieth century.□

Coming in *Dissent*: Feminism and Rights

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Joseph M. Schwartz

"VOTES COUNT, BUT RESOURCES DECIDE"

DEMOCRACY AND ITS CRITICS, by Robert A. Dahl. Yale University Press, 1989. 397 pp. $29.95.

Democracy and Its Critics is a rigorous summary of the life work of one of America's premier political scientists. It is also a timely antidote to the right's equation of democracy with the "freedom" of an unrestrained capitalist market. In a reasoned yet passionate tone Dahl defends democracy as a system of political equality that promotes the freedom of individuals to live under laws of their own choosing. While upholding "polyarchy" (a society of autonomous interest groups, civil liberties, and competitive political parties), Dahl recognizes that inequitable distribution of economic and intellectual resources limits the democratic claims of these regimes.

Dahl's work over the past twenty years on the integral relationship between economic and political democracy generously responds to the radical criticisms made of his work in the 1960s, which held that his theory underestimated how class, racial, and gender inequalities undercut the promise of liberal democracy. But his preference for analyzing social institutions through individual relationships leads Dahl to underestimate the ways in which democratic capitalism structurally favors corporate power. As a result Dahl may be too optimistic about the immediate possibilities for democratic transformation.

Democracy, in Dahl's view, is the only system for arriving at collective decisions that respects the moral equality of human beings. He contends that democracy rests on adherence to a strong principle of equality that holds that all adults subject to the binding collective decisions of an association must have potentially equal decision-making power.

In the past decade American political theory has been consumed by a debate between Rawlsian liberals, who believe that rights rest on the individual capacity for free choice, and "communitarian" critics, who stress the primacy of the community as shaper of individual moral capacities. Dahl bridges these excessively counterposed positions by holding that it is precisely our belief in a democratic community that necessitates our commitment to individual rights. But Dahl distances himself from many liberals by rejecting the notion that rights are best defended by an independent judiciary and a written constitution. Such institutions may serve as evidence of democracy's commitment to civil liberties, but for liberties to be secure they must be embodied in the day-to-day practices of a living political community.

Conceiving of human beings as moral equals, Dahl contends that support of universal suffrage rests on a belief that each person is likely to be the best judge of his or her own interest. This presumption of personal autonomy is critical to Dahl's rejection of all conceptions of "guardianship." From Plato to Lenin, the major theoretical challenges to democracy have relied on the contention that ordinary people cannot know their true interests and that "guardians" should rule in their interest. Implicit here is the idea that there exists one best way to lead our lives or one set of true universal interests. If, however, moral choice often involves a trade-off among competing values, then it is best to construct a political system in which each has an equal chance to express his or her desires.

But personal autonomy—the capacity to make informed decisions in one's own interest—needs to be socially nurtured. Essential to a full-fledged democracy are the social and economic goods necessary to ensure each individual the possibility of an "enlightened understanding" of his or her interest. Dahl contends that modern pluralist societies are composed of such diverse interests that the only common good they can agree upon is the democratic process itself. Yet Dahl's own emphasis on the economic and cultural prerequisites for democracy implies that the common good may come to more than simply a commitment to formal democratic procedures. If the common good consists of those goods necessary for full and equal democratic deliberation (quality public education, universally accessible child care, health care, and so on) then the common good becomes both a vibrant political life and extensive egalitarian public provision.

Sustaining a commitment to such provision requires a commitment to the liberal democratic values of liberty, equality, and solidarity. "Solidarity"—the least analyzed of democratic values—is the value most threatened by the crisis of the postwar Keynesian order. As the work force of advanced industrial society is increasingly divided by race, gender, ethnicity, and skill, the (often romanticized) solidarity of male, industrial trade unionism becomes a thing of the past. In the United States, although the majority of people dependent on means-tested public provision (AFDC, food stamps,

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Medicaid) are white, a disproportionate minority of the poor are people of color. The right-wing assault on public provision has relied heavily on the myth of an "undeserving" minority poor. Resurgent racism serves as the major weapon against all forms of public expenditure.

Concluding that the greatest barrier to the extension of democracy is not economic inequality but the gap between public policy intellectuals and average citizens, Dahl proposes to narrow that gap through the creation of "alternative publics" of a thousand randomly selected citizens who would deliberate over key policy issues for a year, assisted by technical staff and experts. Their report to representative bodies would indicate the considered judgment of a sample, informed public.

Meritorious as this idea may be, an average public would still be overly deferential to (and dependent upon) "expert" advice if our educational system and division of labor were not altered to reduce the gap between "mental" workers and "manual" laborers. Even if in a just society some division of labor between mental and manual tasks would remain, only by radically restructuring work and educational opportunities could the currently class-based recruitment to these tasks be eliminated. And the division of labor in childrearing would have to be radically altered if political equality were to be achieved between men and women.

Dahl does not touch on the peculiar ways in which American political life further violates the conditions of autonomous deliberation. Privately financed campaigns and television advertisements have engendered a politics of salesmanship so blatant that even the mainstream media comment upon the debasement of political discourse.

"Communitarian" critics of liberal democracy such as Alasdair MacIntyre allege that its neutrality regarding "the good life" relegates it to an uncritical relativism that cannot remedy the absence of participation in public life. But Dahl's use of the principles of personal autonomy and strong equality to justify worker ownership of firms demonstrates that a radical conception of liberal democracy is not neutral in regard to social institutions. Dahl's *Preface to Economic Democracy* (1985) develops a compelling justification for workers' control of major firms. Firms, Dahl contends, are today authority structures subject to the binding decisions of management. Because workers are bound by management decision, the principle of strong equality requires that workers should have a voice in management.

Dahl recognizes that his belief in the workers' moral right to democratically control large firms clashes with the dominant belief in private shareholder and management prerogatives: "Because of the overwhelming weight of existing institutions and ideologies, probably most people, including many thoughtful people, will find it hard to believe that employees are qualified to govern the enterprise in which they work." This structural analysis ("the weight of existing institutions and ideologies") of popular support for corporate prerogatives notably runs counter to Dahl's otherwise "pluralist" belief that the divided nature of American political elites limits their ability to control the political agenda and to shape voter preferences.

Dahl nevertheless maintains his faith, even during the Reagan-Thatcher era, that "polyarchies" will grow more democratic and egalitarian over time because competing political elites ultimately have to respond to voters' preferences. Believing that electoral majorities in Western "polyarchies" consist of ever-shifting coalitions of minority interests, Dahl still holds to the insight of *Preface to Democratic Theory* that competitive elections "increase . . . the size, number and variety of minorities whose preferences must be taken into account by leaders in making policy changes." Political mobilization by small farmers or the elderly prove that in a competitive electoral system nondominant interests can often win on issues that are not of essential interest to dominant elites.

Dahl's analysis touches on a fundamental but partial truth about democratic capitalism. Excluded groups, if mobilized, can use the power of their numbers to win social gains when political elites need votes to hold state power. The importance of the African-American northern vote to the Democratic coalition of the 1960s helps to explain civil rights victories. The subsequent worry on the part of Democratic party elites that white blue-collar and southern voters were abandoning the presidential party explains the current silence of the Democratic leadership on issues of racial inequality and urban decay. Although Dahl recognizes that underorganized or underfunded constituencies (the medically uninsured, nonunionized workers, the poor) can lose out in the pluralist competition where "votes count, but resources decide," he still has an implicit faith that "overlapping membership" between these groups and other, more empowered, constituencies will eventually lead to social gains.

In the 1970s Dahl and his frequent collaborator Charles Lindblom began to analyze the other

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fundamental truth about democratic capitalism: that corporate control of investment provides capitalists with a "privileged position." Even a reformist social democratic government is dependent upon capitalist investment to provide the economic accumulation needed to fund social programs. The mere threat of capital flight or capital strike severely limits the power of democratic governments to implement redistributive reforms. These constraints grow more severe with the globalization of capital.

Surprisingly, Dahl's discussion of the extension of democracy does not focus on the need for international labor cooperation and democratic, multilateral economic institutions if democracy is to regulate transnational capital. Dahl contends that the small, export-oriented democracies' (that is, the Scandinavian countries and Austria) creative use of labor-market and industrial policies to sustain international competitiveness proves that national responses to the globalization of capital remain possible. What he fails to recognize are the severe pressures placed on even these nations' social programs by the race for "global competitiveness."

Radical theorists who have recently discovered the centrality of "pluralism" and "civil society" owe a considerable debt to Dahl's work. Still, Marx's insight that structural inequalities of power limit the value of political democracy remains true. Thwarted by the statism of a command economy, East Europeans intellectuals celebrate "the market" as a metaphor for autonomous civil society, economic rationality, and a politics of choice. But the inequalities in economic and ultimately political power that the unregulated market engenders will eventually refocus the East European political agenda upon the proper balance between the autonomy of economic actors and democratic state regulation. As Dahl's work eloquently demonstrates, the moral values of liberal democracy can only be realized if our economic institutions are shaped by the values of political equality. □

David Bensman

IN OUR SCHOOLS

SMALL VICTORIES: THE REAL WORLD OF A TEACHER, HER STUDENTS AND THEIR HIGH SCHOOL, by Samuel G. Freedman. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990. 431 pp. $22.95.

Half a dozen years ago Americans rediscovered the failure of their public schools. A series of governmental and foundation reports warned that the mediocrity of elementary and secondary school education endangered America's competitiveness in the global economy.

There was little debate either about the diagnosis of America's educational ills or about remedies: Low standards, watered-down curricula, and incompetent or hopeless teachers were blamed for our ills. Higher standards, central control of curricula, intensified accountability, longer school years, and more homework were accepted as solutions.

Absent from public discourse about educational failure was any sense of what it was like to teach in or attend a public school. The texture of daily life in the classroom was missing; in its place were stereotyped images of classroom violence and mass ignorance. Contrast this to the early 1960s, when Jonathan Kozol, John Holt, Charles Silberman, and many other teachers and journalists vividly documented the shortcomings of urban schools and the difficulties encountered by reformers.

The appearance of Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren* and especially Samuel Freedman's *Small Victories* changes the picture dramatically. Both books take us into the classroom, into the lives of teachers and children, into the communities that students carry with them into the school. No one who reads these books can continue to think in the arid, abstract manner of the educational reformers of the last decade; once you plunge into the schools Kidder and Freedman describe, your take on America's educational problems must incorporate a sense of the cultural clashes and discontinuities played out in the public schools and a sense as well of the ways school bureaucracies and distrustful citizens handicap teachers.

Small Victories, the more interesting of these two bestsellers, takes the reader into Seward Park High School on New York's Lower East Side. The book's protagonists are Jessica Siegel, a 1960s vintage graduate of the University of Chicago, and her journalism students, mostly immigrant youngsters from the barrios of Latin America and the rural villages of East Asia.

Freedman chronicles a year in Siegel's life at Seward Park High School as an epic struggle to gain college admission for her immigrant students. The forces of evil include indifferent school administrators, a teacher's union unconcerned with student learning, the corrosive poverty that lives amidst New York's affluence, and ignorant, corrupt, indifferent parents. On the side of virtue is Siegel, a brilliant, caring, perfectionist, and her students, tough and witty survivors.

Freedman devotes extended chapters to the stories

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of two students, one Chinese, the other Dominican. See Wai Mui came to New York via Taishan, China, and Hong Kong. His family was the poorest in a village of poor peasants near the Pacific coast of China. In New York's Chinatown, there were only wearying days and nights in the noodle factories and garment sweat shops. See Wai worked twenty hours a week throughout junior high school and high school, and avoided the gangs that claimed so many children from immigrant families. In Seward Park High School, he wakens intellectually and, with Jessica's help, gains admission into SUNY–New Paltz, despite his low grade-point average and his fragile grasp of the English language.

Carlos Pimentel's story takes us to the Dominican Republic, where Carlos spends his childhood while his parents prepare to give him a better life. After his father emigrates to New York to build a nest for his family, Carlos's mother has to move him from village to city and back again in an effort to make ends meet. When the family is finally reunited in New York's Manhattan Valley, Carlos feels lost and soon joins the drug subculture. After the senior Pimentel undergoes a religious conversion that brings father and son into the orbit of a dynamic youth leader, Carlos begins to straighten up. At Seward Park High School, he becomes a star basketball player, a prize-winning journalist, and a popular actor. He gains admission to SUNY–Binghamton.

Freedman takes us into the classroom, as Jessica teaches *The Great Gatsby*; we hear her ask pointed questions that encourage the students to measure their own dreams for the future against the cynicism of Fitzgerald's characters. Freedman takes us into the Seward *World*'s staff meetings, where Siegel challenges her students to take on the social issues that shape their lives: military recruitment, gentrification, abortion, athletic scholarships.

As Jessica's students gain the confidence to apply their intelligence to social problems and literary texts, as they overcome family problems and adolescent insecurities, as they write their college applications and pass their last high school accountability exams, the reader joins in the triumph of hope over despair, love over hatred.

The second theme of Freedman's drama is Siegel's growing determination to leave the teaching profession. The daily grind of teaching 140 teenagers, grading 140 homework assignments, publishing the school newspaper, and writing dozens of college recommendations suffocates her, leaving no time for cooking, shopping, socializing, reading. "I need a life," she cries over and over. Unwilling to lower her standards, to demand less from herself and her students, she ultimately decides to resign at the end of the year—but only after all her prize students have been admitted to appropriate colleges.

In the manner of J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground*, Freedman interweaves the drama of Siegel and her students with social history. He takes us to rural China, to the valleys and barrios of the Dominican Republic, to the Lower East Side of the Yiddish-speaking immigrants. These forays are beautifully written, and they meld school and society in a way no reader is likely to forget.

But on second reading, *Small Victories* made me uncomfortable. Freedman's dramatic structure, which pits Siegel and the students against the rest of the world, presents most of the immigrant families and cultures in a distinctly negative light. Especially in the first half of the book, Freedman stresses the poverty of the parents of Seward Park students, their poor health, the long hours they must work, which often keep them away from their children, and their sometimes tragic emotional problems. In these pages, the world of New York's poor seems grim indeed, and it seems only natural that so many Seward Park students drop out, succumbing to the lure of the streets, the drug culture, teenage pregnancy, and the rest of the social pathology spawned by deprivation and discrimination.

Because the backgrounds of Seward Park students are portrayed so negatively, the ultimate success of each of Siegel's students, who are, after all, a small minority of the total high school population, appears miraculous; Siegel and her fellow teachers seem like saviors.

This is dramatic stuff all right, but it's not realistic, and Freedman knows it. The parents who raised Siegel's students were poor, but unlike many immigrant parents who have been defeated by their poverty, those portrayed by Freedman in the second half of his book possessed tremendous strength, and they fiercely nurtured their children. They may not have spoken English very well—maybe not at all—but they passed onto their children not only folk wisdom but shrewdness.

Of course, not all children of parents who have been seriously damaged by their poverty will fail, and not all children of parents who have survived harsh social conditions will succeed. Carlos Pimentel is an example of a student whose parents made intense efforts to shelter him but who nonetheless succumbed for a time to the temptations of the drug culture. Doubtless some of Carlos's peers had similarly devoted parents but were unable to recover from their adolescent mistakes.

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It is important to remember that many children in poor neighborhoods come from families that give them a lot of support and strength. Today, in communities around the country, educators are experimenting with methods of drawing such parents into the school, enlisting them as allies in the educational process.

Freedman's negative treatment of immigrant families in the first half of his book will not serve to validate such efforts. Instead, Freedman's dramatic structure of good teacher versus bad parents will reinforce one of the most pernicious prejudices in American education—the idea that ignorant parents are the enemy and that the school's job is to bring the benighted children into the light. Traditionally, schools have excluded parents from the educational process. Parents are discouraged from visiting classrooms; parent-teacher meetings are scheduled infrequently and at hours inconvenient to working parents. If ignorant parents are the enemy, then, of course, they can't be enlisted as allies. There's no reason to explain to parents what the school is trying to teach or how it's trying to teach it.

The school's treatment of the parent as an enemy becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more parents feel excluded from a school, the less they reinforce the school's message, the more they undermine the teacher's method. Working-class parents who sense the school's prejudice against them fabricate excuses for their children's failure, encourage them to go out into the "real world" to get jobs, disparage the value of book learning. Teenagers who prefer the excitement of the streets to the order of the classroom seize on these signals to justify their truancy.

This objection aside, *Small Victories* is an important and beautiful work. Freedman's descriptions of Siegel's classrooms and his portraits of her students are so vivid and so moving that the book may make it easier for readers to think about what sorts of educational "reforms" might make a difference. And by detailing how difficult it is to teach well in a system that provides so many obstacles and so few rewards, Freedman may make readers think twice before they start scapegoating teachers for America's social blight. All in all, this book is a triumph of the journalist's craft. □

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On Paul Goodman

Editors:

I enjoyed reading Taylor Stoehr's appreciation of my father's book *Growing Up Absurd* (*Dissent*, Fall 1990). Although I have not read the book in the thirty years since my father, Paul Goodman, wrote it, Stoehr's account seemed accurate and well put.

In a few respects, however, Stoehr's comments run counter to vivid personal memories. I have written to Stoehr privately about this, but I think that for the record it should be known that I, at least, do not consider my father antifeminist or frequently apolitical. Also, Stoehr's assertion seems simplistic when he says: "As a psychotherapist Goodman put the blame of maladjustment on society rather than on the patient, and treatment was aimed at helping people change circumstances rather than character structures."

My father took much of the responsibility for rearing me at a time when this was far from the social norm. He both expected me to "make something of myself" and provided the necessary support for me to become a psychologist, occasional academic, and writer. He also spoke respectfully of many women academics, artists, doctors, educators. Since my father passionately believed competent child rearing essential for a good society, it troubles me that a passage saying that raising children is "absolutely self-justifying" be read as denigrating to women. I recall my father saying he was puzzled that people read it that way. My father also was constantly engaged in politics; for him, the "personal was the political," censorship and war imminent, and social action a persistent necessity. Were he alive today, it would be difficult for me to imagine him not having a glorious time comparing the fall of the communist empires to the collapse of earlier tyrannies, religious faiths, etc. Finally, although I was never a patient of my father's, it seems highly improbable, from how he acted in daily life and what he said, that he was not concerned with both a patient's character structure and the interaction between a person's character and the society.

Susan E. Goodman
New York, N.Y. □

Anti-Kilson

Editors:

Martin Kilson, in his attack on Shelby Steele (*Dissent*, Fall 1990), used the words "right-wing" and "neoconservative" eleven times (each), unless I missed some. Surely this must set a new record for a short article. On the other hand, he cannot claim originality in using these words as a form of political incantation (or bludgeon) designed to discredit those to whom it is applied by conjuring up self-evident evil for politically right-thinking audiences.

The second matter deserving comment is his comparison of the American black "enemy-memory," or sense of victimization, to its Jewish counterpart. Kilson wrote: "If any American ethnic group warrants the 'enemy-memory' prize I should have thought it goes to American Jews." Jews may indeed "cling to an intense feeling of being victims" and nurture a memory of and identification with victims such as those of the Holocaust. The crucial difference, quite significant in the context of the dispute between Steele and Kilson, is that American Jews did not demand or receive compensation for past victimization nor have they insisted that the sufferings of the past (which stretch back even further in time than black slavery) created a sense or fund of entitlement, an open-ended commitment of society to compensate them for such hardships.

The Jewish sense of victimization might have been as strong as that of blacks, but their belief in the malign forces of society capable of thwarting their aspirations and opportunities has not become a form of entrenched conventional wisdom Professor Kilson seems so anxious to bolster. In any event it does not follow that if the Jewish sense of victimization did not damage Jewish mobility aspirations and opportunities the same applies to all other ethnic groups and especially blacks.

Paul Hollander
Amherst, Mass. □

The World After Communism

Editors:

There's something strange about the dialogue in *Dissent* (Fall 1990) on the postcommunist world and liberalism. Not even the most revisionist minded will quite claim that capitalism has earned its right to life eternal. But other than a random phrase from James Rule, one could not guess, amid all the fearful evidence ready at hand, that the ecosphere just may possibly be in trouble. Irving Howe dissents from his own *Dissent*ers to point out that a great many things are getting worse in a hellish hurry. But even his eloquent pleas seem to me essentially a morals charge rather than a reminder of the disasters that class society, in all its destructive shapes and forms, is bringing down upon us. Even as I write these words, the war fever rages over

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Middle East minerals and land, with unforeseeable but likely calamitous consequences. Not a pretty sight, to put it mildly. Or a convincing demonstration that we can, as a species, survive much more of capitalism's famous success.

But I'm thinking about a different species (or, rather, subspecies) just now, New England's songbirds. The specialists tell us that their numbers are down 70 to 90 percent from thirty years ago, and that without drastic changes they are almost certainly doomed to extinction; half a dozen varieties of warblers, also ovenbirds and grossbeaks, among others. Not a big part of nature. Just an extraordinarily beautiful, irreplaceable part.

They are victims of several related developments but, most of all, of two closely linked phenomena. Suburban housing in New England has stolen their habitat or left the remaining slivers of it so divided that the birds are subject to toxification and new predators. Even more fatal, the steady eradication of rain forests in America's Central American client states, for the expansion of agribusiness (or to siphon off demand for redistribution of existing farmland), has all but destroyed their winter quarters.

Quite a few *Dissent* readers, I hope, will share my belief that humans have no more right to eradicate the songbirds than they have to eradicate us. And share my feeling that this question is not some annoying, unfortunate detail but a meaningful barometer of society's real status. And, finally, to agree that even if these harmless creatures were not the proverbial canaries in the coal mine for us all, they would be worth defending, *for their own sake*, regardless of capitalism's hypocritical rationalizations of "progress" or "economic growth."

What political conclusions might we draw from this? One large one is already suggested by several of the *Dissent* authors, that the eclipse of communism indicates a deeper problem with the socialist project. The Stalinists who staged Eastern Europe's environmental massacres and the Social Democrats of France, England, Spain, and Latin America (to name only a few) who defer supinely to the rigged logic of the marketplace, are successors to the European deputies who voted War Credits in 1914. They could see the catastrophe ahead. But they showed none of the "utopian" rejectionism that the *Dissent* authors, save Howe, castigate. They were realists.

Now we could do with a little more nonrealism. Marxists were wrong to think that their movement's "scientific" grasp upon economics had outdated the dreamers. Capitalism fooled all the optimists, of course, through its unanticipated ability to turn the entire globe into a raw materials supply-house and waste-trough so as to accelerate commodity production. But it fooled no one so thoroughly as those who expected a swift and smooth succession to socialism.

Real hope is a scarce commodity these days, and we should not pretend otherwise. I am nearly as pessimistic as Heilbroner or Wrong, I suppose, about the use of the word "socialism," now evidently of ill repute. But I don't think that capitalism has secured its position, not by a long shot. We have entered the first phases of world crisis unprecedented in many ways, and only the utmost stress upon the rest of the world's resources and peoples allows our reasonably polite Euro-American civil society to continue—for the present. My guess is, with an economic slide ahead, the politeness level will go down noticeably.

Let's call our alternative anything at all, as long as it means an alternative to barbarism. Most of us (or should I say some of us?) still believe, as Howe says, that a society whose power is monopolized by capital must be replaced by a society whose power is monopolized by mass, democratic participation. Real socialism, as he says, has never been given a chance to succeed. Humanity may very well turn to a cooperative form, or many different cooperative forms, as a last resort; we can all hope that it does so before the damage has become overwhelming.

PAUL BUHLE
Providence, R.I. □

CORRECTION

In the Winter 1991 issue, no translator was identified for Stefan Svallfors's article, "Sweden: Social Democrats in Trouble." The translator was Kjersti Board.

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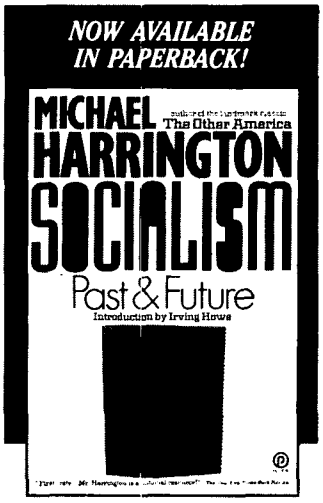

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